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Pauline Frommer's NEW YORK CITY

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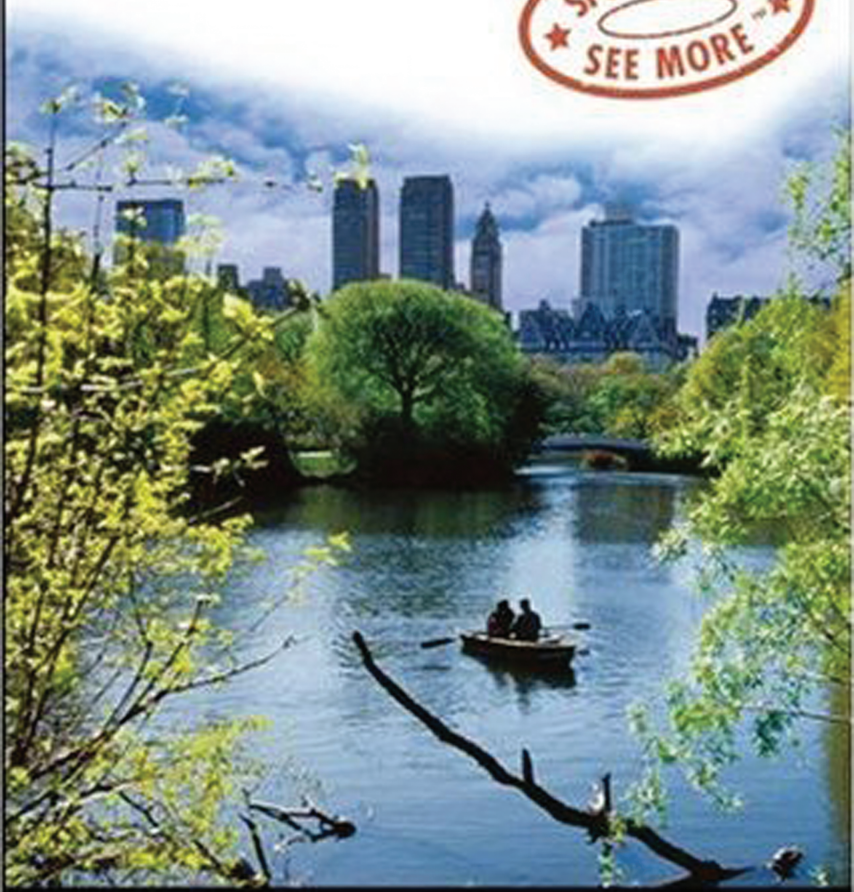

For a New Generation of Smart Travelers

VISIT…

Pauline Frommer's

NEW YORK CITY

SPEND LESS SEE MORE™

1st Edition

by Pauline Frommer

WILEY
Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Pauline Frommer's

NEW YORK CITY

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Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Published by:

Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

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ISBN-13: 978-0-471-76711-4
ISBN-10: 0-471-76711-5

Editor: Naomi Kraus
Production Editor: M. Faunette Johnston
Cartographer: Elizabeth Puhl
Photo Editor: Richard Fox
Interior Design: Lissa Auciello-Brogan
Production by Wiley Indianapolis Composition Services

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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About the Author

Pauline Frommer started traveling before she could speak, seeing the world at a young age with her guidebook writing parents Arthur Frommer and Hope Arthur. She went into the "family biz" over a decade ago, serving first as the editor of Frommers.com and then the travel section of MSNBC.com. Her articles have appeared in numerous publications including *Budget Travel,* the *Dallas Morning News*, *Marie Claire* and the upcoming book *The Experts Guide to Babies*. In 1999, she was awarded a Lowell Thomas Medal from the Society of American Travel Writers for her magazine work. She currently appears every Wednesday night on CNN's Headline News to discuss the latest travel trends. Pauline is married to physical therapist Mahlon Stewart and the mother of two very well-traveled daughters, Beatrix (age 3) and Veronica (age 7).

For my father, without whose love, support and unsparing red pen, this book would never have seen the light of day.

Acknowledgments

I am humbled and grateful for all the help I received in researching this book and bringing it to life. To Joel Fram, Martin Lowe, Kara Flannery, Rob Tate, Jennifer Bush, Elizabeth Shepherd and Rachel Richardson—clubbing, bar hopping, and gaining the 10 pounds I did reviewing restaurants wouldn't have been nearly as fun without your company. To all the people at Wiley, but most particularly my visionary publisher Mike Spring and my insightful editor Naomi Kraus: I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the care, imagination, and wit you've lavished on this book and the other Pauline Frommer guides. Last but not least, I owe a debt of gratitude to my patient and wonderful family—husband Lonnie and daughters Veronica and Beatrix—who have had to practice violin, deal with spelling tests, and often eat dinner without me for the last six months.

—Pauline Frommer

An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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Wiley Publishing, Inc. • 111 River St. • Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every restaurant, hotel, and attraction is rated with stars, indicating our opinion of that facility's desirability; this relates not to price, but to the value you receive for the price you pay. The stars mean:

No stars: Good
★ Very good
★★ Great
★★★ Outstanding! A must!

Accommodations within each neighborhood are listed in ascending order of cost, starting with the cheapest and increasing to the occasional "splurge." Each hotel review is preceded by one, two, three, or four dollar signs, indicating the price range per double room. Restaurants work on a similar system, with dollar signs indicating the price range per three-course meal.

Accommodations	**Dining**
$ Up to $100/night	$ Meals for $7 or less
$$ $101–$135	$$ $8–$12
$$$ $136 to $175	$$$ $13–$17
$$$$ Over $176 per night	$$$$ $18 and up

In addition, we've included a kids icon to denote attractions, restaurants, and lodgings that are particularly child friendly.

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- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

A Note from Pauline

I STARTED TRAVELING WITH MY GUIDEBOOK-WRITING PARENTS, ARTHUR Frommer and Hope Arthur, when I was just four months old. To avoid lugging around a crib, they would simply swaddle me and stick me in an open drawer for the night. For half of my childhood, my home was a succession of hotels and B&B's throughout Europe, as we dashed around every year to update *Europe on $5 a Day* (and then $10 a day, and then $20 . . .).

We always traveled on a budget, staying at the Mom-and-Pop joints Dad featured in the guide, getting around by public transportation, eating where the locals ate. And that's still the way I travel today, because I learned—from the master—that these types of vacations not only save you money, but give you a richer, deeper experience of the culture. You spend time in local neighborhoods, and you meet and talk with the people who live there. For me, making friends and having meaningful exchanges is always the highlight of my trip—and the main reason I decided to become a travel writer and editor as well.

I've conceived these books as budget guides for a new generation. They have all the outspoken commentary and detailed pricing information that you've come to expect from the Frommer's guides, but they take bargain hunting into the 21st century, with more information on how you can effectively use the Internet and air/hotel packages to save money. Most important, we stress the availability of "alternative accommodations," not simply to save you money but to give you a more authentic experience in the places you visit. In this New York book, for example, I'll tell you about an antiques-filled Fifth Avenue mansion (built for the great-granddaughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt), where you can lodge for just $75 a night (p. 64); a working Soho gallery that houses guests in private rooms just steps from the artwork ($110/night; p. 26); and quirky hotels where each room is designed by a different artist—so you might spend the night "under the sea," or in a Tuscan villa, or in ancient Egypt ($99/night; p. 48).

My chapter on "The Other New York" immerses you in the life that residents enjoy: the courses they take, the work they do, the crafts they practice. Page through this guide and you'll find one-day cooking classes with the city's top chefs (p. 184); free tango lessons at the Argentine Consulate (p. 185); tips for how to get on camera at a TV taping (p. 186); and joyous Gospel services you can attend up in Harlem (p. 197), among other experiences.

The result, I hope, is a valuable new addition to the world of guidebooks. Please let us know how we've done! I encourage you to email me at editor@frommers.com or write me care of Frommer's, 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ, 07030.

Happy traveling!

Pauline Frommer

1 My Love Letter to New York

The Best the City Has to Offer

IN THE ANXIOUS DAYS FOLLOWING 9/11, I KNEW A LOT OF PEOPLE—PARENTS of small children, in particular—who considered moving out of the city. We all wondered if we could continue living in a place that was so obviously a target. And as we began drawing up emergency plans, plotting escapes across bridges, telling family members under which tree in Central Park we'd meet them should another attack occur, I wondered if I was a fool for wanting to stay. There was a feeling that life would never return to normal, that we were a broken city, and that something fundamental had been lost.

Something fundamental was lost, of course—our innocence, our sense of security, and some 3,000 of our friends, neighbors, and family members. But the city and its residents have rebounded with a steely nerve and sense of exuberance that I wouldn't have thought possible in 2001. New York is thriving. Crime is at its lowest rate in decades, visitor numbers have reached historic levels, and the preschools here are turning away dozens of children because so many families are staying in the city that there just aren't enough of these facilities anymore. Though I'm too superstitious to say it out loud, there's a feeling that New York won its skirmish with the dark side—at least for now.

The main reason we stayed? There's simply no other place in the United States so brimming with opportunities. Those of us who live here open our doors to incredible options each and every day: The chance to experience the best and newest in the worlds of art, theater, dance, and music. The ability to feast on expertly prepared foods from all over the world. The belief that we can make our voices heard on political issues, in this news media capital of the nation. The opportunity to meet today's movers and shakers, the ambitious who come here because they know that if they want to achieve a certain level of prominence in their careers, or in the eyes of the world, New York is the place to do it (are you humming, "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere" right now?).

There's another factual reason for a New Yorker's pride. Because of the density and diversity of our population; our long history as a center of commerce and ideas; our access to the United Nations, Wall Street, and the opinion makers of Madison Avenue; and endless other resources, there's simply *more* here than in most other places. And if that claim seems extreme, well, you'll just have to regard boastfulness as another unavoidable characteristic of "the Big Apple." What would New Yorkers be without our big mouths?

In visiting New York, you, too, are opening yourself up to a world of wonderful opportunities. In fact, that's what can make New York so intimidating to visitors—there are just so many darn choices. In this chapter, I've sorted through a book's worth of options, selecting my favorites.

SIGHTS YOU'VE GOTTA SEE, THINGS YOU'VE GOTTA DO

When something is the best in the hemisphere, it must be visited, and so when you come to New York, you have no choice but to visit the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (p. 140). I think it's one of the great wonders of the U.S., right up there with the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone, a place so stuffed with eye-popping treasures that you could spend your entire vacation here and see only a small fraction of its highlights.

But you can't stay mired in the past. New York has the trifecta of American modern art museums in the **Museum of Modern Art** (best collection, p. 143), the **Guggenheim** (best fun-house architecture, p. 145), and the **Whitney Museum** (best for cutting-edge contemporary art, p. 150); and you should visit at least one of the three.

> *"New York is an ugly city, a dirty city. Its climate is a scandal, its politics are used to frighten children, its traffic madness, its competition murderous, but once you have lived in New York and it has become your home, no place else is good enough."*
>
> —John Steinbeck,
> *The Making of a New Yorker*

For those who care more about science than art, and require that science be artfully presented, **The American Museum of Natural History** (p. 142) is a hall of marvels. With one of the finest and most intelligently presented dinosaur collections in the world, and a state-of-the-art planetarium, it's a winner with people of all ages.

Of course, New York includes much more than museums in its cultural scene. Its **theaters** (p. 296) and **jazz clubs** (p. 275) are the best in the nation, and one night of your New York vacation must be dedicated to being an audience member. Those with more high falutin tastes flock to **Lincoln Center** (p. 271) for world-class opera, ballet, and classical music.

THE FINEST HISTORICAL SIGHTS

You'll want to spend some of your vacation simply walking the city's teeming streets, staring up at skyscrapers, and visiting the areas where history was (and continues to be) made—it's an essential NYC experience.

Though New York City was captured early on in the American Revolution, much of the planning for the war took place here, as did many of the most important events in the early life of the Republic. And you'll come face-to-face with all this history in the **Lower Manhattan Historical and Financial districts** (p. 12). This area is also the site of one of the defining events of modern history: the attack on the **World Trade Center** (p. 136), and hundreds of people come here daily to pay their respects.

In New York harbor, reached by ferry, the **Statue of Liberty** and **Ellis Island** (p. 133) are two definitive sights that speak eloquently to the great contributions, yesterday and today, that immigrants make to the United States. Just around the river bend is New York's famous **Brooklyn Bridge** (p. 139), one of the great engineering feats of the 19th century and still the best stroll in the city. You can easily see all three sights and Ground Zero in a day.

Uptown are the skyscrapers that defined Depression-era New York (and are now competing for tourist dollars with their observation decks): **Rockefeller Center** (p. 138) and the **Empire State Building** (p. 125). These are the city's goosebump-makers; both are thrilling to visit, as much for their views as for the buildings themselves.

Flanking the East River, the **United Nations** (p. 126) is the final, history-making must-see. Though visitors can no longer sit in on debates (too many disruptive protesters), touring the grounds and learning its history is a fascinating exercise.

UNCOMMON LODGINGS

Where you stay will obviously color your experience of the city. Although most travelers simply pick a standard hotel in Times Square, you'll get a more accurate (and I think pleasant) picture of life here if you choose to stay . . . well, anywhere else.

You'll also have a more exciting visit by picking non-traditional lodgings. Why not stay in a room off a working art gallery in SoHo? Or in a spare bedroom in the home of a chef who will cook a gourmet breakfast for you in the morning? Or have an entire apartment to yourself in prized SoHo, Greenwich Village, or near Museum Row on the Upper East Side—areas where hotels are scarce, but rental apartments are abundant? In chapter 3 I give you the tools for finding these and dozens of other more unusual lodgings.

If a hotel is more your speed, look into the less standard ones, those that reflect both the personality of their owners and of the city itself. At **Hotel QT** (p. 30), in Midtown, you pay just $125 a night for the choicest of digs with a deejay poolside, so you can groove as you swim. At **Carlton Arms** (p. 48), **The Hotel Chelsea** (p. 46), or **Gershwin Hotel** (p. 49), your room is a one-of-a-kind creation, painted (and sometimes sculpted) by a visionary artist who's been given carte blanche to create an unusual environment (the rooms range from Jackson Pollock-esque creations, in which every surface is splattered with paint; to Mexican casitas, strung with colorful cut paper; to rooms that look like they're at the bottom of the ocean, with colorful fish murals surrounding the bed). Or choose a gracious inn, such as **Incentra Village House** (p. 50); **Country Inn the City** (p. 59); **Gracie Inn** (p. 61); or **Wall Street Inn** (p. 56), where the decor will be quaint (floral wallpaper, antique furniture, cushy beds) and the service oh, so personal.

Or simply get the most for your money in a clean, comfortable room that will serve as an affordable sleeping place (so you can spend your money on great meals, or theater tickets). Some of the best value sleeps in New York include **The Chelsea Lodge** (p. 44), **Chelsea Pines** (p. 45), **The Pickwick Arms** (p. 42), **Second Home on Second Avenue** (p. 53), **Amsterdam Inn** (p. 56), and **Larchmont Hotel** (p. 50). All are exceedingly pleasant places to stay, where you give up an amenity (at some you may have to climb a flight of stairs or perhaps share a bathroom) for a terrific price.

DINING FOR ALL TASTES

Though you'll have traveled only to NYC, your tongue can travel the world, odd as that may sound, at the many excellent ethnic restaurants that dot the city. In Chinatown, you can visit veritable palaces of **dim sum** for brunch (p. 87), choosing

your meal from carts that careen through these vast banquet halls, laden with dumplings, noodles, sesame seed balls, and other starchy delights. Or head to the East Village's **Little Japan** (p. 94) to try foods usually found only in Japan, from *shabu tatsu* meals (you cook your own steak in a vat of boiling water) to teahouses to fast-food stands selling *okonoyake* (a sort of Japanese pizza, made with squid). Uptown in the area near the Theater District, your choice ranges from **Uzbekistani kebabs** (p. 77) to **Ethiopian stews** (p. 75) to the purple corn juice of **Peru** (p. 76). And in Harlem, you get the finest in **Southern-style soul food** at a bevy of friendly, dinerlike places.

And then there are those New York classics: deli sandwiches, bagels, hot dogs, and pizza. Don't try to eat all four in one day—the damage to your digestive system could end your vacation right there—but you should try at least one during the course of your stay. For pizza, I like **John's** (p. 74) in the Theater District and Greenwich Village; for hot dogs dash into **Gray's Papaya,** or simply pick one up at a sidewalk stand; for deli food, go with the classic **Katz Delicatessen** (p. 96); and for bagels, the choices are many (see p. 117 for a full list of options).

Gourmet fare is an obsession in Manhattan, so you're going to want to have at least one splurge meal while you're here. A very reasonable $25 will net you an elegant and delicious three-course meal at celeb chef Charlie Palmer's **Kitchen 22** (p. 82). For more exotic fare in a fabulously chic setting, head to **Spice Market** (p. 103) and order carefully (as tabs climb quickly). For exquisite American food and wine, visit the closet-sized **Tasting Room** (p. 92), a foodie temple with the friendliest service in town. And if you just love desserts—who doesn't?—make a pilgrimage to **Chikalicious** (p. 91), where $12 will get you an imaginative, ultra-gourmet dessert tasting menu.

THE FINEST "OTHER" EXPERIENCES

Get off the tourist treadmill and take part in one of the dozens of activities performed by actual New Yorkers each day. Attend a **lecture at the 92nd Street Y** (p. 183) or a **cooking class at the Institute of Culinary Education** (p. 184); take a free lunchtime **tango class at the Argentine consulate** (p. 185); pray at a **gospel service in Harlem** (p. 197); or spend an afternoon **steaming at the Russian and Turkish Baths** (p. 193) of the East Village. Really adventurous travelers can venture out to Brooklyn to the artists' studios and galleries of **Williamsburg** (p. 202) or the vodka-soaked **Russian nightclubs of Brighton Beach** (p. 196). Or see how the lucky among us work by taking a **backstage tour of the Metropolitan Opera** (p. 190) or by being part of an **audience at a TV taping** (p. 186). These and many more activities covered in chapter 6 allow visitors to see sides of the city that outsiders rarely know about and, most importantly, to meet actual New Yorkers.

2 Lay of the Land

The geography of New York: The city's top neighborhoods and the best ways to get around

LOTS OF PEOPLE TRAVEL TO NEW YORK, PLOP THEMSELVES DOWN INTO Times Square, and never go anywhere else. They live in fear of venturing into the neighborhoods that exist for purposes other than tourism.

You don't have to be among them. By devoting just a few minutes to the basic geography of New York and its distinctive neighborhoods, you can immensely enhance your enjoyment of this multi-faceted city. And once you absorb the highly logical organization of New York's transportation system, you'll find that you can zip from place to place with minimal fuss and expense.

THE GRID PLAN OF MANHATTAN

Finding your way around Manhattan is easier than in almost any other city because of the careful plan that was adopted for laying out the city's avenues and streets. In the areas above 14th Street, the city fathers imposed a strict and unnatural grid upon Manhattan, leveling hills and tearing down existing homes to create straight, evenly spaced thoroughfares in all but a few places. The grid consists of numbered streets and avenues that cross each other at right angles. If you can count up to 100, you can get around this surprisingly compact island.

Streets in Manhattan are numbered and run from east to west. So if you're on 23rd Street and wish to get to 42nd Street, you simply go 19 blocks north. To get from 80th Street to 75th Street, you walk 5 blocks south.

The avenues of Manhattan run north to south, with some bearing numbers and others names (which does complicate the picture, but only a bit). Those that are numbered ascend from east to west, with First Avenue being close to the East River, and Twelfth Avenue on the far west side of the island. Interspersed between these numbered avenues are several named avenues, including (among others) Park, Lexington, and Madison. The named avenues live primarily on the East Side, between Fifth and Third avenues in Midtown and Uptown; on the West Side, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth avenues turn into Columbus Avenue, Central Park West, and Amsterdam Avenue above 59th Street.

The exceptions to the grid rule (all found below 14th St.) are the Financial District, Chinatown, the Lower East Side, Greenwich Village, SoHo, and TriBeCa. These southern parts of Manhattan were the first to be settled, and therefore follow a haphazard non-system of streets and alleys that curve and twist, sometimes doubling back on themselves (most famously in Greenwich Village, where Fourth St. collides with . . . Fourth St.). Because most of these southern-section streets bear names rather than numbers (Delancey St., Wall St., Church

THE BRONX
GREAT NECK
LONG ISLAND
Long Island Sound
Throgs Neck Bridge
Bronx-Whitestone Bridge
Clearview Expwy.
Cross Island Pkwy
Grand Central Pkwy
Van Wyck Expwy.
John F. Kennedy Int'l. Airport
Shea Stadium
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park
Forest Park
Cross Bay Blvd.
Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Rikers Island
LaGuardia Airport
Grand Central Pkwy.
Northern Blvd.
QUEENS
Woodhaven
Jackie Robinson Pkwy.
Yankee Stadium
Triboro Bridge
Queensboro Bridge
Queens Blvd.
Long Island Expwy
BQE (Brooklyn-Queens Expwy)
Broadway
Pennsylvania Ave.
Linden Blvd.
125th St.
East River
FDR Drive
Central Park
Fifth Ave
Broadway
George Washington Bridge
Henry Hudson Pkwy
Hudson River
MANHATTAN
42nd St.
23rd St.
Queens-Midtown Tunnel
Williamsburg Bridge
Manhattan Bridge
Brooklyn Bridge
BROOKLYN
Flatbush Ave.
N.Y.U.
Delancey
Canal St.
West Side Hwy
Lincoln Tunnel
Holland Tunnel
HOBOKEN
JERSEY CITY
Ellis Island
Governor's Island
Statue of Liberty
Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel
Upper New York Bay
Staten Island Ferry Terminal
NEW JERSEY
Passaic River
NEWARK
Newark Int'l. Airport
Newark Bay
Bayonne Bridge
STATEN ISLAND
0 3 mi
0 3 km

St.), orienting yourself can be tricky, so it's important to carry a good map and to ask for directions when necessary—even native New Yorkers get lost down here.

GETTING AROUND MANHATTAN

Because most travelers confine themselves to Manhattan, I will as well in this section. Those traveling to the outer boroughs can be confident, however, that public transportation—subways, buses, ferries, or some combination of the three—can get you anywhere you wish to go in the city proper, whether it be the sandy shores of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, or Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. The city's transportation network is run by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (almost always referred to by locals as the MTA), and you can head to the MTA's website at **http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us** for complete schedules and maps for New York City's myriad transportation options. You can also key in your itinerary at **www.hopstop.com**, a "Mapquest" for the subway set, which will give you complete directions, including how far you'll walk to get to the station and whether you'll also need to take a bus.

> *"A car is useless in New York, essential everywhere else. The same with good manners."*
>
> —Mignon McLaughlin

SUBWAY

I wish I could confine my transportation advice to just two words—**"the subway"**—and be done with it. To my mind, the New York City subways, 100 years young in 2004, are the single most efficient, rapid, easy, and affordable way to get about anywhere you'd want to go in Manhattan, with the exception of some far eastern sections of the Upper East Side (First Ave., York Ave., and so on) and of those times you have to cross town while north of 59th Street. But because of the starring role the subways have played in action films set in New York over the years, with squinty-eyed thugs menacing timid grandmothers as lights flicker on and off in graffiti-riddled trains, many visitors are scared to go underground.

That fear is unwarranted. Not only is the graffiti gone, but a recent refurbishing of the system has eliminated the "haunted house" quality of the lighting. The trains are now kept surprisingly clean, and thanks to the persistent efforts of those invisible transit cops (you rarely see a transit police officer, but there are 3,000 of them all told, keeping order underground and on buses), the subways are safer than they've ever been.

Of course, that doesn't make them Disneyland. Though the cars are heated in the winter and air-conditioned in the summer, the platforms are not, and because many are underground, they feel 10 degrees colder in winter than the city streets and 10 degrees hotter in summer. Pickpockets remain a problem, as they are in London, Rome, and every other city where large numbers of people jam together in small spaces. So remember to move your wallet to a place where you can keep track of it before boarding the trains (if you're wearing pants, the front pocket is usually best).

Your New Best Friend: The MetroCard

In order to use the subways, you'll have to purchase a MetroCard—a thin, bendable plastic "credit card" that you can fill up with money at subway stations or buy pre-filled at some neighborhood stores (most stores that sell MetroCards will post a sign). MetroCards are swiped for entry at subway turnstiles and can also be used on buses.

Ostensibly, each subway ride costs $2, but because there are a number of fare card options, the amount is actually slightly flexible. An **unlimited MetroCard** allows you to board as many subways and trains as you like within a set period of time for one low cost. A 1-day unlimited card is $7; a weeklong pass is $24. To make this unlimited card pay for itself, you'll need to ride four times in 1 day for the daily pass, or at least twice a day on the weeklong pass. Only one person can use this type of card at a time; once swiped, it becomes inoperable for 20 minutes.

If you'd prefer a **pay-per-ride MetroCard,** the minimum amount you can put on it is $4 (or two rides); and if you have to change from subway to bus, you'll automatically get a transfer on your card at no extra charge, so long as you board your second trip within 2 hours of the first. There is no limitation on how many people can share this card.

A word on swiping: Look at your card closely and follow where the arrow points as you're dipping or swiping, so that the magnetic strip lines up correctly with the electronic card reader. It sounds silly but you don't want to swipe too slow or too fast, or the card may not work. Also, never try a different turnstile if you've swiped unsuccessfully, as you may end up being charged for an extra ride. (Sometimes dust stops the magnetic strip from working, so wipe the card on a tissue or your shirt and try again if you're having problems.)

The Subway Trains

Until you get the system under your belt, the trains can be confusing to navigate. Briefly, here are the major lines and where they generally go within Manhattan (once they reach other boroughs, all bets are off):

- The 4, 5, and 6 (each number appearing in a green circle) run the length of Manhattan (mostly along Lexington Ave.) on the East Side. You can remember that these are East Side trains by the fact that they're the color of money (and so is the Upper East Side). The 6 is a local train; the other two skip stops.
- The 1, 2, and 3 lines are red (a comment on the formerly radical nature of the Upper West Side?), and run roughly parallel to the 4, 5, and 6 but on the West Side of Manhattan (along Seventh Ave.). The 1 is the local train in this case.

- The yellow N, R, and Q trains follow the twisting path taken by Broadway, up to Central Park (57th St.) and then, perhaps to satisfy a yen for great Greek food, veer off at that point towards Queens.
- The orange line (V, F, B, and D) is a wild card, splitting into two branches at 53rd Street (it runs along Sixth Ave. in Midtown) and confuses even native New Yorkers. The D should stand for "dangerous" because if you don't hop off at 59th Street, you'll be riding it for 66 blocks without an "off" (which is lovely if you want to go to Harlem, and a real time-waster if you don't). Consult the map on the inside cover of this book very carefully before attempting to ride this line.
- The blue line (A, E, and C) restricts itself primarily to the West Side, going the farthest west of any of the subways as it runs along 8th Avenue from 50th to 14th streets. If you're taking it to get to the Museum of Natural History, remember the Duke Ellington tune *Take the A Train,* which advises that if you don't get off at 59th Street, you'll be going straight up to Harlem (the C is the one you want for this route).
- Lastly, the small but mighty shuttle train S simply trudges back and forth between Grand Central Station and Times Square. It serves a vital function, though, as the lack of other cross-town trains connecting the different lines in Midtown is one of the major flaws in the system. The L at 14th Street serves much the same function, traveling from Eighth Avenue on the West Side, to First Avenue on the East Side, before heading onward to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and beyond.

BUS

I recommend using buses to head east or west, and then switching to the subway as quickly as possible; a MetroCard will get you an automatic and free transfer from one to the other. Although a bus can give you a nice view of the city, they are subject to the whims of traffic and can be extremely slow, especially between the hours of 7:30 and 9:30am, and 4 and 7pm. The one zone where buses are very handy is the Upper East Side, especially the neighborhoods along First Avenue, Second Avenue, and York Avenue—areas that can be quite a hike from the nearest subway station. As these are primarily residential neighborhoods with few restaurants or sights of note, most visitors never venture this far east.

Why Yellow?

When John Hertz, the founder of the Yellow Cab Company, was trying to decide on a color for his vehicles in 1907, he commissioned the University of Chicago to conduct a scientific study of which colors stand out best at a distance. Yellow won and became so associated with taxis that, in 1969, the city decided to make all medallion cabs yellow to distinguish them from so-called "gypsy" or non-licensed cabs.

Renting a Car & Driving Around the City

In three words: Don't do it.

Rental car rates in the New York City area are among the highest in the nation. Parking on the streets can be a full-time job, and parking in lots will drain your vacation budget. Driving in the city is an exercise in frustration, battling traffic jams, errant pedestrians, and streets that never seem to go in the direction that you want.

I'll repeat: Don't even think about it.

To ride the bus, you must use a MetroCard (you can purchase this fare card in subway stations) or have exact change of $2. Drivers do not provide change, though if you're stuck, other passengers will usually exchange coins for bills if you ask plaintively enough.

During the daytime, buses stop only at marked junctures along their route. You'll know that you're at a bus stop if there's a sidewalk shelter or a short pole on which is posted a map giving bus routes. Generally, the buses that run from Uptown to Downtown or vice versa stop every 2 to 3 blocks; "limited" buses are express runs that stop every 8 to 10 blocks—or whatever the distance is between the major east-to-west streets (14th St., 23rd St., 34th St., 42nd St., and so on). Crosstown buses that run east to west (or vice versa) stop at every avenue. At night, buses still stick to their routes in terms of pick-ups, but they will often drop off passengers between stops, so be sure to ask.

TAXI

In 2004, the city's taxi and limousine commission instituted its largest price hike in about a decade, upping the starting price for just getting into a taxi to $2.50. Then every fifth of a mile (which roughly translates to 4 street blocks or 1 avenue block in most areas of town), the meter ticks off another 40¢; if you're stuck in traffic for 2 minutes, standing still, the meter will tick off yet another 40¢. To add insult to injury, there are surcharges for certain busy times of day: You'll pay $1 more between 4 and 8pm; and 50¢ more for a night ride between the hours of 8pm and 6am. It's appropriate (and expected) that you tip 15% to 20% of the meter's total at the ride's conclusion.

Before the price hike, sharing a cab was sometimes cost-effective for couples. It doesn't usually work out that way anymore. On a trip between, say, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the TKTS booth in Times Square, a cab will cost approximately $8.50 ($9.50, with tip) if you're traveling during the afternoon rush hour, which is more than double what you'd pay on public transportation. The expenses all add up, so take the subway or a bus when you can (unless you're traveling with three or four people). By law, taxis cannot accommodate more than four people, so don't even try it.

Subways are also often two to three times as fast as taxis, even with the wait time factored in. My daily commute from my Village apartment to my daughter's school on the Upper East Side, roughly 80 blocks, takes literally 10 minutes on

the express subway, with another 15 minutes factored in for walking to the subway and waiting for it to arrive. When we've been in a rush and taken a cab instead, we've arrived late (and gotten a scolding from her teacher), as a cab in morning rush-hour traffic will often take 35 to 40 minutes to cover the same ground. I'll repeat what I said before: Take the subway when you can.

THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF NEW YORK

It never fails to amaze. I'm strolling along a pleasant street of small brownstones, I come to the corner, and suddenly, the landscape morphs and I'm a small ant in a canyon of skyscrapers, or else I'm a visitor to India, surrounded by cumin-scented restaurants and men with strong accents beckoning me into their curry joints. New York is a city of multiple personalities, and like Sybil they can shift on a dime, going within the space of one block from elegant to seedy, from industrial to chic, from ethnic to all-American.

It's this quicksilver quality, this constant metamorphosis, that endows even a simple stroll in New York with real excitement. I urge you to spend at least part of your vacation simply ambling around, window-shopping, eavesdropping on passing conversations, or exploring places beyond the most heavily touristed areas.

Here's what you'll find in the various—and strikingly different—neighborhoods of New York City.

LOWER MANHATTAN—THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT

Best for: Museums, historic sights, architecture, access to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty

What you won't find: Great dining, evening entertainment

This is, quite simply, where New York City—then New Amsterdam—was born. The area packs the same historical wallop as do the colonial sections of Boston and Philadelphia. It was on Wall Street that George Washington took the oath of office as the nation's first president. It was here, at Fraunces Tavern, that the brave Sons of Liberty gathered to plot the overthrow of the British. It was at Castle Clinton and then Ellis Island that millions of immigrants flooded the city in the 19th and early 20th centuries to get their first glimpse of a "promised land." The great financial movers and shakers also stalked the area (and continue to do so today), and a visit to these "canyons of greed" at the beginning of the day or at 5pm, when those men and women in suits and trader's smocks pour onto the streets, still buzzing with adrenaline, is an exciting sight.

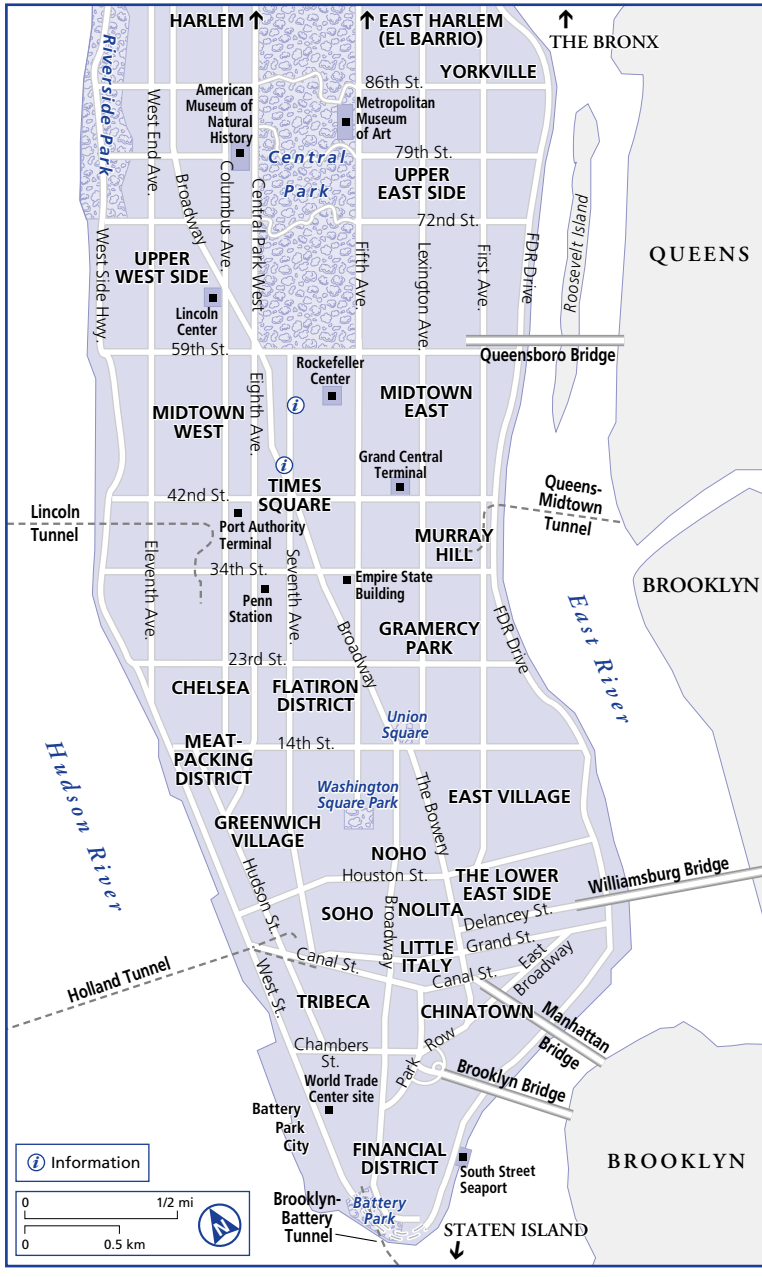
Recent history, of course, has overshadowed these sights for many visitors, and the area has been inundated, to the dismay of some locals (who deplore the tacky vendors and self-appointed guides who now crowd the site), with visitors wishing to pay their respects at the World Trade Center. You should visit the center, especially if it's your first time in New York City, but do try to be respectful, as many who live in the area lost loved ones on September 11, and they find the sight of tourists smiling for photos in front of the site a disturbing one.

CHINATOWN (& LITTLE ITALY)

Best for: Affordable gourmet dining and shopping

What you won't find: Top museums, streets without gridlock

Manhattan Neighborhoods



At points, Chinatown takes on the aspects of Shanghai or Beijing: the dense crowds on the streets, the awnings with Chinese characters, the pinging sound of Chinese conversation everywhere. It's a fun, truly transporting area to visit and one that has been voraciously swallowing up other neighborhoods—Little Italy, the Jewish Lower East Side—for the past few decades. In fact, except for 2 blocks of Mulberry Street (from Canal to Broome), strung with colored lights, Little Italy has ceased to exist (because of the ever-expanding growth of Chinatown) and is really only a tourist-trapping shadow of its former self. There are a handful of interesting shops (p. 251) and some worthwhile cafes for gelato and cappuccino, but no noteworthy restaurants and very few real Italian-Americans around anymore.

No, if you're going into this area, what you really want to see is Chinatown. To do this, you want to bury your inhibitions, if you can, and wander in and out of the fish markets; the herbal pharmacies; and the fruit stands with the odd, spiky produce. Talk to the shopkeepers, bargain for goods, and ask questions (don't be shy!). You should also taste everything you can, because this is one of the cheapest and best neighborhoods for chowing down.

Go to p. 85 for a full description of all your options, including a list of places where you can simply nosh as you sightsee.

TRIBECA, NOLITA, & SOHO

Best for: Dining, bars, star-sightings, great architecture, shopping

What you won't find: Top-rated art galleries (they're now in Chelsea) and museums

What is it about former factories and tenements that the ultra-rich find so appealing? Though they certainly wouldn't want to work in them, these formerly industrial areas, have been drawing a lot of "bolded names" lately: media whizzes, movie stars, financial aces, and other proud members of the *nouveau riche* (the old money is still firmly entrenched uptown). And with these *arrivistes* has come a welcome wagon of hot new restaurants, boutiques, spas, and *boites,* making the entire section a great place for average folks to window-shop and dine (primarily on splurge meals).

These areas, especially SoHo and TriBeCa, also have a grand look about them thanks to their cobblestone streets, old-fashioned streetlights, and profusion of cast-iron buildings (SoHo has the most of any area in the world), with their proud columns, porticos, and other frills. For my walking tour of SoHo, which will give you a bit more of the history of the area, go to p. 239.

LOWER EAST SIDE & EAST VILLAGE

Best for: Dining, bars, dance and music clubs, innovative theater, and local designer-clothing shops

What you won't find: Museums (there's only one of significance here)

For millions, this area was once the portal to America. In fact, the buildings you see on the Lower East Side were built expressly to house the millions of immigrants who flooded into New York between roughly 1840 and 1930. At the turn of the last century, this was the most densely populated area in the world, with a dozen to an apartment, and pushcarts jamming the streets.

Nowadays, this is where crowds flock in the after-hours for some of the city's most happening bars, lounges, and music clubs. It's here that you'll find new

designers opening up their own tiny stores for cutting-edge fashion; where food prótegés of the great chefs come to start their first restaurants; where "poetry slams" thrive and indie bands wail in dank basement clubs; and where recent college grads bunk eight to a two-bedroom apartment. I may be prejudiced because I live in the East Village, but I find it the most vibrant area of Manhattan, though many blocks have lost their gritty edges thanks to rising real estate prices.

GREENWICH VILLAGE

Best for: Strolling, dining, historic sights, lovely architecture, specialty food shopping, theater, live music clubs, star sightings
What you won't find: Museums, many hotels

Greenwich Village has always been the area where the city's outsiders and oddballs have found a haven. In Dutch Colonial times, it was farmland set outside the walls of the city, and a number of slaves were given conditional freedom in return for providing the burghers with food (and fighting off Native Americans). At the turn of the 20th century, the area became known as a bohemian enclave, where artists of all sorts could find cheap lodging and companionship. In the 1950s it was at the center of the Beat movement; in the 1960s and '70s the area around Christopher Street became the center of a burgeoning gay rights movement (in the '80s it was a hotbed for AIDS-related activism).

Today, high real-estate prices have dulled the Village's edge and you're more likely to see moms with strollers than long-haired poets strolling the pavement near Sheridan Square. And that mom might be Sarah Jessica Parker or Uma Thurman, two of the many celebrities who now call the tree-shaded brownstones of the Village home sweet home. But the charm of the area is still intact, as is the illusion that you've entered another city altogether. Very few buildings in the neighborhood reach over 10 stories (most are lower than that), and small shops elbow out chain stores. It's a wonderful place to simply come and get lost in.

GRAMERCY SQUARE, UNION SQUARE, & THE FLATIRON DISTRICT

Best for: Dining, historic sights, nice architecture, and Off-Broadway Theater
What you won't find: Museums, top shopping (with a few exceptions)

If you look up as you meander through these three bustling areas, you're likely to see brown street signs proclaiming LADIES MILE. It was on this stretch, mostly on Broadway and Park Avenue South, that the first wave of department stores transformed the lives of New Yorkers in the 1850s. Instead of hopping from the dry goods shop for fabrics to the milliner's for hats to the cobbler for shoes, women from all over the city came here to outfit themselves and their homes in stores that, wonder of wonders, had everything they needed under one roof. Notice the large plate glass windows on many of the facades, another department-store innovation. Above, the windows are much smaller and point to the second meaning of "Ladies Mile": brothels. When the stores closed for the day, the establishments upstairs opened, and ladies of the evening took over the mile. And where there's prostitution, theater often follows: The area around Union Square was New York's first show district.

Interestingly, this same area has become another important theater district for New York's thriving Off-Broadway scene in recent years. In fact, around half of the Pulitzer Prize–winning plays of the past decade made their debut in the theaters located off Union Square and downtown. The dining scene is also especially hot here, with hugely popular restaurants such as Gramercy Tavern, the Union Square Café, Craft, Fleur de Sel, and Hama all in residence.

For the best strolling, head directly for Gramercy Park, the only privately owned park in the city (the keys go to those apartment owners whose windows overlook the park). Around the park are a number of beautifully preserved historic homes and clubs, including the wisteria-clad home of former Mayor James Harper (4 Gramercy Park S.), the Players Club (at 16 Gramercy Park S., whose members included Edwin Booth, Mark Twain, and Thomas Nast), and the National Arts Club (15 Gramercy Park S., a hangout of Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Dreiser).

CHELSEA & THE MEAT-PACKING DISTRICT

Best for: Art galleries, nightlife, gay bars and clubs
What you won't find: Theater, museums

Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood is today what SoHo was 10 years ago, and what Greenwich Village was 15 years ago. The major SoHo galleries (and a host of newcomers) have moved to Chelsea, as has Greenwich Village's large gay population. This makes for a lively cultural scene with many bars and clubs. To read about these many galleries, go to p. 156. The so-called Meat-Packing District, named for the slaughterhouses in the area (though the name is a double entendre, as this formerly unpopulated area was, in the 1980s, a place where many gay men came to have trysts), has also become an extremely popular nightlife destination. An offshoot of Chelsea, it's New York's adult Disneyland, filled with late-night clubs, bars, and restaurants that are unhindered by the city's zoning laws (as there are no schools or churches in this part of town).

MIDTOWN WEST, INCLUDING TIMES SQUARE

Best for: Theater (of course) and entertainment of all kinds, shopping (in the Garment District and at Macy's), catching a train
What you won't find: Top-notch dining (with a few exceptions), museums (with the exception of the museums of 53rd St.), serenity

Midtown is what most people think of when they think of New York, and the reason that so many visitors say with a smirk, "Well, it's a nice place to visit but I couldn't ever live there." And because they're basing their judgments on crowded, loud, pushy Midtown, they're absolutely right—it is unlivable . . . which is why so few New Yorkers actually live in this area. In certain areas of Midtown, there is no residential housing whatsoever and it's only the tourists who even attempt to get a good night's sleep in this bustling neighborhood.

So what is Midtown West? I'm defining it roughly as the area from 30th Street—where Pennsylvania Station and the subway stations beneath it disgorge a full one million people each day—up to Columbus Circle, with its chichi Time Warner Center mall and the start of the Upper West Side. In between, you'll find Broadway theaters, the shopping wonderland of Macy's and the Manhattan Mall,

the Garment District (located primarily in the 30s, the area where designers have their offices), sun-blocking office towers, the mini-museum mile of West 53rd Street, and the ethnic restaurant strip that is Ninth Avenue from 42nd Street to 57th Street. As you can see, it's an eclectic area with much to recommend it, but also much to avoid. I make this plea in the hotel chapter, and I'll make it again here: If you can lodge in another area of the city, do so. You'll have a much more manageable, pleasant, and authentic New York experience if you do.

MIDTOWN EAST

Best for: Christmas displays and window shopping (along Fifth Ave.), historic sights, great architecture

What you won't find: Museums, interesting nightlife (with a handful of exceptions)

In the 1950s, Madison, Park, and Lexington avenues started to sprout with skyscrapers and soon were rivaling the Wall Street area for office space. Moving east from Fifth Avenue to Third Avenue, north from 42nd Street to 57th, that's primarily what you'll find here: people in suits, looming glass towers, and lots of traffic. Among the great architectural sights are Grand Central Terminal (p. 172), the Chrysler Building (p. 171), and the Seagram Building (p. 173). Go closer toward the East River, and the area becomes largely residential, with little to recommend it to the visitor beyond Bloomingdale's department store and the United Nations (p. 126).

A tremendously popular part of Midtown East is Fifth Avenue as it runs from 57th Street down to the Empire State Building at 34th Street, a delightful street to stroll on a sunny afternoon for the superb window-shopping (at Tiffany & Co., Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue, and the many tony boutiques that line both sides of the avenue). This stretch is also home to the largest Catholic cathedral in the United States, St. Patrick's, and (right across the street) the grand urban masterwork that is Rockefeller Center.

UPPER WEST SIDE

Best for: Museums, Central Park, bars, kid-friendly restaurants, classical music and dance

What you won't find: Top-notch dining (with a few exceptions), great shopping (again with a few exceptions)

In some ways, the Upper West Side has the most suburban vibe of any of Manhattan's neighborhoods. National chain stores line the major thoroughfares, and the sidewalks swarm with strollers. This is arguably the most popular area in the city for middle-class families, thanks to its proximity to both Central Park and Riverside Park, and to such kid-friendly attractions as the Children's Museum of Manhattan and the American Museum of Natural History.

It wasn't always this way. When I was growing up on the Upper West Side, and even before that, the neighborhood had a reputation for being an intellectual hotbed, a place where highly political New Yorkers planned protests, burned bras, and held potluck fundraisers. No more. But it's still an extremely pleasant place to visit, with good if unoriginal shopping; a handful of top-notch museums; New York's famous art hub, Lincoln Center; and, of course, access to the glories of Central Park. The recent addition of the Time Warner Center, on Columbus

Circle, gives the neighborhood the dubious distinction of having the priciest food court in the world; at Masa, the Japanese restaurant on-site, diners pay $300 for an *omakase* (a tasting selection for lunch or dinner). And that's before drinks!

UPPER EAST SIDE

Best for: Museums, fine dining, great architecture, window-shopping, Central Park

What you won't find: Interesting and affordable restaurants, theater, clubs

10021 is the richest zip code in the world and it belongs to the Upper East Side, in particular that swank swatch of pavement that runs from 61st to 80th sts. Also known as the "Gold Coast" and "Millionaires Mile"—don't be surprised if you see Robin Leach lurking about—this is the stomping grounds for New York's high society: the Prada-clad women (thin until they die) and bowtie-wearing gents who sit on the boards of the neighborhood museums, go to a lot of cocktail parties, and endow scholarships for kicks. Their mansions and marble-faced town houses make for nifty sightseeing among those interested in architecture; and the shops along Madison Avenue are a nose-at-the-window paradise, a peek into the extravagant and sometimes slightly odd-ball fashions adopted by the ultra-rich and the top designers who serve them.

Museums also play a key role on the Upper East Side, and there's a greater concentration of top-flight museums here than there is anywhere else in the country, with the exception of The Mall in Washington, D.C. You'll want to spend at least one day of your stay exploring "Museum Mile"—the Metropolitan, the Guggenheim, the Whitney, the Cooper-Hewitt, and more—though if you're watching your pocketbook, you should probably dine and shop elsewhere.

Interestingly enough, once you cross Third Avenue, prices drop precipitously both for restaurants and shops. That's because the lack of good public transportation in this part of town has made it one of the least desirable areas in Manhattan in which to live, so rents and general cost-of-living are lower here than on other parts of the island.

HARLEM

Best for: Dining, clubs, historic sights

What you won't find: Theater, museums (with the exception of the Studio Museum), worthwhile shopping

Perhaps the most rapidly transforming neighborhood in the city, Harlem is safer and cleaner than it's been in decades . . . and may be losing some of its intrinsic character as a result. A largely African-American neighborhood since the 1920s—and home to some of the greatest black writers, politicians, and artists of the 20th century—the neighborhood is now drawing an increasing number of Caucasian residents, lured here by lower real estate prices and the beauty of a brownstone-lined community. My recommendation: Visit here soon before the authentic soul and Caribbean food joints disappear, the gospel churches lose their swing, and the rhythm of the streets changes its beat. There's much to see, including Hamilton Grange (the home of Alexander Hamilton; p. 231), the Studio Museum (p. 163), dozens of well-preserved Beaux Arts brownstones, and hopping clubs.

AWAY FROM MANHATTAN: THE BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN

Best for: Museums, parks, lovely architecture, ethnic dining, great views of Manhattan, innovative galleries

What you won't find here: Notable theater (with the exception of the Brooklyn Academy of Music and St. Anne's Warehouse)

If Brooklyn had not traded its sovereignty to become a borough of New York City in 1898, it would be the fourth largest city in the United States today, just after New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. With 2,465,326 citizens (according to the latest census), it certainly is the most populous borough in the city, and at 71 square miles it's also the largest. Which is all a long way of saying that it's very difficult to pin down the nature of Brooklyn, as it's just too darn big to be summarized in a nutshell.

The two most affluent neighborhoods are Brooklyn Heights, which is right off the Brooklyn Bridge, boasting spectacular views of Manhattan; and Park Slope, the area surrounding Frederick Law Olmstead's *other* great work of landscape architecture (after Central Park), Prospect Park. Both are stellar strolling areas, filled with lovely Beaux Arts brownstone buildings (Brooklyn Heights was the first neighborhood in the city to be landmarked).

The borough's artists tend to live in Williamsburg, with a few holdouts still in DUMBO (the area "Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass") and, to a lesser extent, in the Italian-American stronghold of Red Hook. You can pop by all three for afternoons of gallery-hopping. Williamsburg also has one of the largest Hasidic Jewish communities in the world. Walk the streets peopled by this sect and you may feel as if you've stepped back into an old country Shtetl (an illusion only somewhat ruined by the incongruous but ever-present cellphones).

Eastern Europe also makes an appearance in Brighton Beach, which boasts the largest ex-pat Russian community in the world. It's not the friendliest place to visit, but it's fascinating nonetheless, with stores selling endless rows of nesting dolls and Lenin T-shirts, and small-scale nightclubs that outglitz and outcrass Las Vegas (see p. 196 for my Russian nightclub recommendations). Just up the shore from Brighton Beach is famed Coney Island, still an amusement park, but with less panache than in its earliest days. Though much of it is closed and some of it is falling apart, it's still worth a visit, if only for the legendary Cyclone (one of the scariest, shakiest roller-coasters in the world) and for the yearly Freak Show, one of the last of its kind in the United States. Visiting the beach here or in Brighton Beach is another highlight.

THE BOROUGH OF QUEENS

Best for: Museums, ethnic dining

What you won't find: Theater, great shopping, top architecture (with a few exceptions), top non-ethnic restaurants

Archie Bunker no longer lives in Queens. In fact, the grouchy, bigoted xenophobe at the center of the famed 1970s sitcom *All in the Family* probably wouldn't recognize the borough today. In just the past 50 years it has gone from being a somewhat insulated, working-class community of Irish- and Italian-Americans to the most international community in the States.

It's this ability to globe-trot in an afternoon that makes Queens appealing, despite the dreary, industrial look of so much of it. Whether you're downing samosas and shopping for saris in very Indian Jackson Heights; breaking plates at the late-night clubs of Greek Astoria; or buying miracle water and tacos at a Mexican *botanica* in Corona, there's much to taste, smell, and experience in Queens.

Museums are another big draw, and the borough now tops Brooklyn for its cultural attractions, kicking in four great ones—The Museum of the Moving Image, PS 1 Museum of Contemporary Art, Isamu Noguchi Galleries, and the Louis Armstrong House. Combining a visit to one of these outstanding institutions with a meal at a local ethnic restaurant is a highly recommended outer borough adventure.

THE BOROUGH OF THE BRONX

Best for: Baseball, Italian restaurants, zoos, and gardens
What you won't find: Museums, nightlife, other types of worthy restaurants, hotels, theater

I may be condemned for this assessment, but to my mind there are only four reasons a tourist should even think of going to the Bronx: Yankee Stadium; The Bronx Zoo; The New York Botanical Gardens; and the Italian restaurants and stores of Arthur Avenue. If you have no interest in any of these sights, you can skip this giant borough without too much regret.

THE BOROUGH OF STATEN ISLAND

Best for: Views of Manhattan from the ferry
What you won't find: Notable museums, nightlife, hotels, theaters, truly great restaurants, top architecture

And I'll again be blunt: Except for the fun and free ferry ride you can take here (which will get you a terrific view of the Manhattan skyline) and possibly historic Richmond Town (a living-history museum), there's no reason a tourist should visit this highly residential borough. Yes, there are a handful of cultural and historic sights here, but none that justify the hour-long commute.

Funfact

The 7 subway line that spans Queens was declared a "Millennium Heritage Trail" by the White House in 1999, placing it in the same category as the Lewis and Clark Trail in terms of importance to the nation. It earned that honor by vividly reflecting the immigrant experience in the U.S.: People from over 150 different nations use the train on a daily basis and peacefully live side-by-side with neighbors from around the globe.

3 Accommodations, Both Standard & Not

In which you'll discover all the options, from spare cots in private apartments to comfy digs in boutique hotels

TIME NOW FOR A CHANGE OF MOOD. IN A BOOK THAT CELEBRATES THE FUN and attractions of New York, it's necessary for just a short while—the length of this chapter—to deal with a far less pleasant topic: the high-priced, over-priced accommodations of New York. By and large, hotels in Gotham charge more than hotels anywhere else in America (an average of $250 per night) for rooms that aren't nearly as spacious or full of amenities.

Though I admit this unpleasant fact, I'm not discouraged by it. Bargains can be found. Values exist. If you carefully and patiently review all your options, you will eventually and invariably find a decently priced place to lay your head. To aid in that task, I discuss in this chapter no fewer than (a) forty-seven individual hotels, (b) six organizations for obtaining bed-and-breakfast rooms in private apartments, and (c) a dozen hostels, specialty hotels, and retreat houses.

AN ODD SEQUENCE FOR OUR DISCUSSION: And to spotlight the city's very best values, I've reversed the normal order of a hotel chapter and start with the city's many private apartments, whose owners rent their spare rooms (sometimes their entire apartments) for far less than a hotel would charge for similar space or comfort. These are fascinating possibilities that justify—in my view—placing our hotel discussion in the second half of this chapter.

Then, when we reach the more standard lodgings, I offer a careful, methodical (some might call it exhausting) analysis of every well-priced hotel in Manhattan, ranging from the bargain level to the value bracket (neither budget nor deluxe, but smack in the middle) to the occasional small splurge. The chapter will end with the ultra-low-cost hostels, military hotels, and religious retreats (open to all) that New York offers to the most unpretentious of visitors.

RENTING A PRIVATE APARTMENT

In New York, a whole world of alternative lodgings is based upon what one critic called "the dirty little secret of American life, that no one has enough money." More supposedly well-off New Yorkers than you'd ever imagine are supplementing their incomes and balancing their budgets by inviting visitors into their well-appointed apartments, converting their homes into mini-hotels. My stepsister is one of them, actually. When she is short on cash, she simply arranges to stay at a

Why Are Gotham's Rooms So Costly & Vacancies So Scarce?

Want to get depressed? An estimated 40 million people visiting New York filled 86% of the city's hotel rooms (some 20% more than in Orlando) in 2005. The high occupancy rate means that hotels can pretty much charge whatever they darn well please. Room rates average $250 per room per night, highest in the nation, steepest in the hemisphere. And the number of available rooms is declining each year. Soaring residential real estate prices have made it advantageous to convert hotels into condominiums, causing the island of Manhattan to lose a great deal of its hotel space in recent years (though some new hotels are slated to open in 2006 and 2007).

All this results in near-sold-out conditions on many nights of the year. And that's why I discuss so many different hotels: to give you the best chance at finding a vacancy. If, as in so many guidebooks, I limit myself to a dozen choices, you'd rarely find a room!

friend's house for the weekend or for a week, and then rents out her spacious, Upper West Side doorman apartment. Her temporary guests get lodgings twice as big as any hotel room, in a wonderful neighborhood, for three-quarters the cost, and with a kitchen to boot. It's a win-win situation for both her and her guests.

There are also those New Yorkers who aren't as "nomadic" as my stepsister, who simply rent out a room within their apartments, often with a private bathroom attached. Though the privacy for the visitor isn't as complete, the prices are even lower.

And in that kind of "hosted" situation, visitors get a rare glimpse of actual life in Manhattan. They set up house in a real neighborhood, get to know the deli guy, the locals-only restaurant, and the bar around the corner.

What kinds of apartments are available to the visitor?

- *A tidy room off an artist's gallery in SoHo. In the mornings, you breakfast surrounded by elongated Plexiglass nude sculptures; at night, the French expat artist who is your host invites you to dine with his family in the apartment downstairs.*
- *A town house in Greenwich Village with a decor Martha Stewart would applaud, where you sleep in an antique mahogany four-poster bed and awake in the morning not to traffic noises but to the calls of birds chirping in the backyard garden.*
- *The first-floor apartment of a historic Victorian Harlem town house, where the walls sport African art, with African baskets in the corner for decoration. For breakfast, your hostess gives you coupons to the excellent French patisserie down the block.*

As you can see, each of these New York B&Bs is radically different from the next, bearing little resemblance to the doily-and-dried-flower inns of New England and the Midwest.

And unlike many B&B inns in the rest of America, where a quaint decor translates into a huge upswing in price, these B&Bs are significantly less expensive than hotel stays. At the Harlem apartment, for example, a large, comfortable space

with a full kitchen, a washer/dryer, and an in-room bathroom, is just $89 a night for one person, $99 for two, and $109 for three (there's a second brass bed in one of the two apartments). At the artist's loft, the prices start at just $110 at night. And while the Greenwich Village apartments are more expensive at $189 to $199 a night, a Gotham hotel room this luxurious and well-located would cost at minimum of $300 a night.

I drew the above examples from **BedandBreakfast.com**, an 11-year-old online registry service—just one of the many resources travelers can use to book this kind of stay.

YOU HAVE TWO BASIC CHOICES

In the world of New York apartment rentals there are basically two types of accommodations:

- **Unhosted apartments:** Full apartments which the renters have entirely to themselves for the course of their stay. (Many agencies will not allow visitors to rent an entire apartment for fewer than 5 nights, though with certain units and at slower times of the year, a 3-night minimum might apply.)
- **Hosted apartments:** Apartments which the guest shares with a New Yorker who lives on premises. Usually the host rents just one room and sleeps in another bedroom. Only a 3-night minimum stay is required for a hosted arrangement.

There are pluses and minuses to each type of lodging. At **unhosted apartments,** guests have total privacy. You can come and go at will without worrying about disturbing anyone, buy your own food, cook meals, and live essentially as you would in your own home. The downside can be the lack of any kind of guidance: If you need advice, there's no one on premises that you can turn to, and you're also alone if the toilet won't flush or the key jams in the lock (the rental agency or owner will fix the problem, but it will probably take a bit of time). Also, these types of rentals are usually a good 25% to 50% more expensive than hosted rentals.

At **hosted rentals,** you may feel constrained by the presence of the host and in some, but not all cases, may have to share a bathroom. That's usually the worst it gets. In the best-case scenarios, your host will act as an affable advisor, helping to pave your way in the big city, and perhaps forming a friendship that lasts beyond the visit. In fact, one unsung perk of doing a hosted rental is that you meet unusually gracious, resourceful, quirky New Yorkers. "Most hosts are off the corporate grid," explains Margaret Borden of City Sonnet. "We get a lot of artists, actors, musicians, chefs, and other creative types because these sorts of people have the time to do a second job and often need the extra income. Most are

Don't Dismiss Brooklyn & Queens

By choosing a hosted stay in Brooklyn or Queens, guests can sometimes pay hostel-level prices for a private room with private bathroom in some of the loveliest areas of the city. NY Habitat, for example, represents hosts in Astoria, Queens (approximately a 20-min. subway ride from Manhattan) who rent spacious double rooms for as little as $60 a night. The same prices can sometimes be found in the brownstone area near Prospect Park and right across the river in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

B&B Stays: Questions to Ask Your Potential Host

Though most in-apartment B&B stays are fun, carefree holidays, sometimes . . . well, things can go mighty wrong. It's extremely important to find out what sort of person you may be sharing your vacation with and what the apartment's like before you put down a deposit. Call your potential host or the agency to go over any concerns you may have before committing to any hosted stay.

Some questions you may want to ask:

1. **What is the host's schedule?**
   Some hosts will be in their apartment for most of the day, while others work outside the home, meaning that you'll have the apartment to yourself for large chunks of time. Find out before you leave.
2. **Where does the host sleep in relation to the room you'll be using?**
   Another privacy issue: Will your host be in the room right next door, eavesdropping, intentionally or not, on your every sigh or snore? Or will there be a room or two between your two bedrooms? In some extremely rare cases, cash-crunched hosts have been known to rent out their own bedrooms and take the living room couch for a week. If the listing is for a one-bedroom, you may want to find out if this is the case, as that can be an uncomfortable situation, especially if you have to walk through the living room to get to the bedroom or bathroom. (From what I understand, this is not a common scenario, but hey, it's better to ask.)
3. **Is the bathroom shared or private?**
4. **Are there pets in the house?**
5. **Are there any rules the host has for his or her guests?**
   Whether or not guests can smoke in an apartment is obviously an important issue, as is a guest's use of the shared space (I once met a host who only allowed the guests she liked to venture into the living room). Most hosts do not allow guests to cook, except to reheat prepared foods, so if this is an issue for you, discuss it before you book. And sometimes the rules can be even more unusual—I know of a hostess who keeps kosher and requires guests to separate the plates used for dairy products and meat products (not an easy task).
6. **What does the bedroom face?**
   Does the room get a lot of sun in the morning? Does it face a busy street, or a quiet back courtyard? These questions may be key if you're a light sleeper.

extremely well traveled and all really enjoy meeting travelers." In hosted situations, breakfast is usually included in the cost of the stay and, as I said before, guests typically pay less for this type of lodging.

Two very nice standard perks offered in both hosted and unhosted rentals are free local calls and Internet access. As with hotels, 99% of all B&Bs, of both types, provide cable TV in the bedrooms.

What B&Bs don't offer are the services and amenities that you'll find at hotels—there's no concierge on-site to help you book theater tickets or make restaurant reservations. And you can forget about daily maid service. Most hosts clean the apartment only between guest stays, and rely on you to make your own bed and sometimes even take out the garbage. The only room service will be from the pizzeria down the street, and your business center will probably be the local Kinkos, so think long and hard about whether or not this type of stay, and the independence it entails, is for you.

If you do decide to go the B&B route, the most logical way of finding lodgings is through a rental company. I've vetted all of the major agencies in New York, visiting dozens of the properties they represent, and have pared the firms down to five recommendations. I also include a short section at the end of this discussion on "registries" that will guide you to B&Bs, but I have not inspected nor do I guarantee any of the lodgings they list.

Here are five companies that have vetted the apartments they represent:

- **Affordable New York City** (☎ 212/866-1880; www.affordablenewyorkcity.com). The largest of the services that handle both hosted and unhosted stays, Affordable New York City represents approximately 120 apartments, which is double the number of the closest runner-up. According to owner Susan Freschel, wider coverage means greater numbers of options for the renter: "I like to give potential clients four or five choices each time someone writes me," she says. "I give my clients more options than other B&B services." She also has an odd habit of underselling apartments, giving rather cursory descriptions of some truly fabulous apartments because she worries that thieves might try to use her

Affordable New York City, in Brief

PRICES: Hosted stays: $95 to $120 with shared bathroom, $125 to $145 with private bathroom. **Unhosted apartments:** $150 to $175 studio, $175 to $230 one bedroom; up to between $275 and $400 for larger apartments. **EXAMPLES OF AVAILABLE RENTALS:** With deep-red walls, beautiful antiques, and oil paintings galore, one Midtown share looks very much like a set from a Merchant-Ivory film (not surprising, as the hostess is a set decorator). As the bathroom is shared, these elegant digs go for about $120 per night. Or rent a landmark building in Chelsea, with full kitchen, 14-foot ceilings in the bedroom, and a large living room lit by a room-wide skylight. An East Village rental has room for six, and a lush garden out back comes complete with tiki torches that you can light should you dine at the large farmer's table set in the yard. **PLUSES:** Large selection; expert staff. **NEGATIVES:** Will not accept children under 10; does not handle properties outside of Manhattan. **TIP:** When she can, owner Freschel will accept last-minute bookings, and during slow periods she is open to bargaining (just don't try in Oct, Nov, and Dec).

At Home in New York, in Brief

PRICES: Hosted stays: $75 to $100 single, $90 to $135 double, $135 to $160 triple. **Unhosted apartments:** $125 to $295 double, $165 to $375 for unit that can sleep up to eight. **EXAMPLES OF AVAILABLE RENTALS:** A huge, country-inn-like guest room overlooking Central Park with rattan furniture and three single beds, each covered with a handmade quilt. All in all, this apartment can host nine guests in three rooms, with the host in a fourth room. Elsewhere, *"Mi casa es su casa"* is the motto at a high-rise in the East 60s, where the gracious host even allows guests to throw parties on her oversized terrace. Across town, on the West Side, views of Lincoln Center and the river add to the luster of an oversized one-bedroom unhosted rental in a doorman building. **PLUSES:** Prime locations; personality-filled apartments; highly personal service. **NEGATIVES:** Website could use improvement. **TIP:** There is some wiggle room on prices here, so don't be shy about bargaining.

service to case apartments before striking. So the home of an antiques dealer on the Upper West Side, where you sleep in an ancient Chinese wedding bed (don't worry, it's quite comfortable) surrounded by exquisite antiques, is described simply by the size of the room and its amenities. "I'd rather have the guests be happily surprised," explains Freschel. In business for 8 years, Freschel has a terrific reputation and a loyal following among both hosts and guests (about 40% of her bookings are either repeat customers or referrals).

- **At Home in New York** (☎ 800/692-4262 or 212/956-3125; www.athomeny.com). For an apartment on the Upper East Side or West Side, turn to At Home in New York, which specializes in those areas and offers a total of 65 hosted and unhosted units. Lois Rooks, the owner, has to be the most hands-on of all of the agents, checking in guests herself at the apartments, supervising the cleaning staff, even buying new sheets and pullout couches for owners who are out of town. When I asked her how often she inspects apartments, she laughed and said, "Oh, I'm over at the apartments all the time; I can't count how many times in a year I'll see them." A former actress, Ms. Rooks has been in the business for 20 years and knows her territory (and hosts) backwards and forwards. My only complaint would be with the At Home in New York website, which doesn't show pictures for all properties. Rooks, however, will send large pictures by e-mail to anyone who is interested in a particular apartment.
- **City Sonnet** (☎ 212/614–3034; www.citysonnet.com). City Sonnet places guests into some of the most exclusive and sought-after areas and buildings in the city. Lower Manhattan—Greenwich Village, the East Village, SoHo and TriBeCa—is their forte and they offer hosted and unhosted apartments in the very centers of these neighborhoods. Only about 10% of City Sonnet's apartment owners work with other agencies, so you'll find apartments here that are unique to this broker, such as a lovely chinoiserie-laden B&B on the Upper East Side, run by a globe-trotting Guatemalan expat; or a light-drenched SoHo loft of a professional chef who sometimes prepares a gourmet breakfast of roasted pineapple with raspberry sauce and fresh scones for her guests.

A fairly small agency with just two full-time employees, one part-timer, and a stable of approximately 50 apartments, City Sonnet picks its hosts with care, and checks up on them at least once a year. "We don't take on a place unless we'd like to stay there ourselves," says owner Margaret Borden. "If the apartment is ugly or the host seems weird or unfriendly, we simply don't work with them." As City Sonnet does not work with a large number of apartments, it's necessary to call at least a month to a month and a half in advance to reserve a place. Then it can take up to a week of phone calls and e-mails to complete the booking, as the staff here sees the process as one of "matchmaking." "There are bookings we won't make," says Borden. "If we feel that the guest really needs the services of a hotel or a facility that we don't have, we'll refer them elsewhere. We want to make sure that each guest has a quality experience."

For unhosted stays mainly

- **NY Habitat** (☎ 212/255-8018; www.nyhabitat.com) is one of the oldest and largest of the vacation rental companies—so big, in fact, that it's branched out to cover stays in Paris, London, and the French Riviera. For New York alone it lists approximately 350 apartments at any one time (out of the 1,200 it has in its database); there are seven full-time staffers who inspect these apartments (generally once every 2 years) and follow up on complaints. These busy folks also take the pictures and write the dry but accurate descriptions you'll find on the NY Habitat website.

  Approximately 85% of NY Habitat's listings are for unhosted stays. Half of these come from huge companies that rent out dozens of furnished apartments at a time. As you might expect, these are not stylish, unique digs—some of these big companies even rent the furniture they use, adding just one more layer of corporate blandness to the enterprise. That being said, the apartments are clean and utterly uncluttered. Unlike other agencies, NY Habitat offers a large number of oversized one- and two-bedroom apartments, perfect for families. Many of these can house four, six, or eight people quite comfortably (though Junior may have to sleep on a fold-out couch).

  NY Habitat also works with individual owners who may rent their apartments for a few weeks when they leave town. This doesn't, however,

City Sonnet, in Brief

PRICES: Hosted stays: $80 to $125 single, $110 to $165 double. Artist's lofts, which are subdivided former factory spaces, never cost more than $110 single, or $125 double. **Unhosted apartments:** $125 to $295 for doubles, $165 to $375 for rentals that can sleep up to eight. **EXAMPLES OF AVAILABLE RENTALS:** An artsy studio with full kitchen right on Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village, available for unhosted stays. Or a screenwriter's antiques-filled guest room (there's even a four-poster bed) near the Theater District. **PLUSES:** Excellent customer service; well-located personality-filled apartments. **NEGATIVES:** Not as many choices as with larger agencies; no last-minute bookings; probably won't bargain on prices.

NY Habitat, in Brief

PRICES: For studios, a few in Brooklyn and Queens will cost as little as $60 to $80 a night, but in Manhattan these will usually rent for $125 to $165. One-bedroom rentals, including those that can sleep up to four, run $135 to $225. Two-bedroom rentals, including those that can sleep up to eight, run $200 to $375. **TIP:** Because NY Habitat charges a higher-than-normal 35% commission, its prices can sometimes be higher than the competition's. But like the other agencies, the staff here is willing to bargain, so give it a try (they have a lot of apartments to move). **EXAMPLES OF AVAILABLE RENTALS:** A high-rise two-bedroom with river views and polished wood floors in the East 50s, corporate decor, sleeps up to six. Or a Theater District two-bedroom that sleeps up to eight people, four on fold-out couches located in the dining room and living room. Clean and roomy with a large balcony; bland-looking furnishings. Or an East Village one-bedroom walk-up, home of a stylish "performance artist" with silver taffeta drapes, quirky antiques, and a bathtub in the kitchen. **PLUSES:** Excellent customer service; large number of units available at any one time; a higher-than-average percentage of family-sized apartments and uncluttered corporate-style apartments. **NEGATIVES:** Steeper-than-normal fees (35% commission); many apartments on the far east and far west sides of Manhattan.

seem to be the primary focus of their business, especially since NY Habitat has now instituted a policy of only working with hosts who can be upfront with their landlords or co-op boards about accepting short-term "boarders." It's a controversial issue (and I'll note at this point that NY Habitat is the only company in town with this policy). While hosting guests is not illegal (owners pay taxes on these stays, after all), it is frowned upon in some buildings, which is why other agencies will ask guests to be discreet when first checking into the B&B. The folks at New York Habitat refuse to do that. "I'm not going to ask someone to lie and say they're visiting a friend," says Nick Borg, manager. "I don't want one of my clients to get booted out mid-stay because a co-op board finds out about their presence in the apartment." In practical terms, this policy relegates NY Habitat to apartments that may be in the less attractive, less central neighborhoods on the eastern and western fringes of Manhattan, as these areas are less likely to be dominated by co-ops (many of which have house rules forbidding boarders).

Directory Services (with no guarantee of quality)

- **BedandBreakfast.com:** There are also those online services which leave "due diligence" to the vacationer and simply provide a forum for guests and would-be hosts to "hook up" with each other. One of the largest and oldest of these (founded in 1994) is BedandBreakfast.com, a global Yellow Pages for inns around the world. It primarily lists traditional, multi-room inns—places that offer four, five, six, or more rooms to the public (in fact, it represents some of

the larger inns that I have profiled later in this chapter, such as Chelsea Lodge, Gracie Inn, and Country Inn the City). Unlike some services, the inns must pay a fee to list here, which eliminates fly-by-night operations from the mix. The lodgings that I've obtained from BedandBreakfast.com, which I have visited and then profiled below, have been consistently professional, clean, and darn nice in all instances.

(Two other websites, **BnBfinder.com** and **BnBInns.com**, are organized in a similar fashion to BedandBreakfast.com but each has just 10 listings apiece, all of which are also found on BedandBreakfast.com [35 choices]).

- **craigslist (www.craigslist.org)** is a massive website offering nearly unlimited listings with absolutely no filter at all (for all the good and bad that implies). It receives over 10 million visitors a month. Folks with apartments or rooms to rent can post here at absolutely no cost, and dozens do so every month, so you'll have a tremendous number of options in all price ranges. I periodically check this site and have found Village studio apartments renting for as little as $85 a night, and a large three-bedroom apartment, with full kitchen, living room, and dining room going for $300, so there are real steals to be found. But craigslist comes with some risks. Obviously, none of the rentals have been inspected, and many of the owners will be renting for the first time, meaning that you could end up in a remote neighborhood, sleeping on a futon on the floor, or bathing in a shower that hasn't been scrubbed since the Clinton administration. Or you could snare a real gem. It's a bit of a gamble, and I do have to say that the vast majority of listings are for apartments in the same price ranges of the agencies I list above. In such cases I would think the logic is clear—go with the known quantity over the unknown.

AND NOW, THE HOTELS OF MANHATTAN

Maybe out of sheer inertia or habit, maybe out of prior bad experience with a room in someone's apartment, most visitors to New York will choose to stay in a standard hotel. I profile 62 of these properties in the remainder of this chapter, grouped according to the geographical area of New York in which each is found.

Hotels within each area are set forth in ascending order of cost, starting with the cheapest and moving upwards to end with an occasional "big splurge." Each hotel listing is preceded by one, two, three, or four dollar signs, indicating its price range per room, as follows:

$: Up to $100 a night
$$: $101 to $135
$$$: $136 to $175
$$$$: Over $176 per night

In addition, many hotel listings carry a cluster of stars, indicating our opinion of the hotel's desirability (this does not have anything to do with price, but with the value you receive for the price you pay). The stars mean:

No star: Good
★ Very good
★★ Great
★★★ Outstanding! A must!

As you begin your quest, let me suggest that you don't call just the hotels in this chapter. To get the best rate, shop around first, surf the Internet and, in some cases, wheedle and bargain (I'll include some tips below on how to do just that). Hotel rooms are a time-sensitive product and if they go empty, hoteliers lose money, so you do have *some* muscle (not much in NYC, but a bit) when it comes to getting a good price.

TIMES SQUARE

In other world cities, hotels tend to cluster around train stations, but in New York, the largest concentration of hotels is in the Theater District which, while not the geographic heart of Manhattan, is considered by many to be the de facto center of the city. It's also the most crowded, cacophonous neighborhood in Manhattan, with few grocery stores, drugstores, good restaurants, or other amenities that help make a visit pleasant. Staying in this often ugly neighborhood and fighting the crowds on a daily basis is not my idea of a relaxing vacation, but because so many travelers insist on being close to the theaters (and as there are so many options in this part of town), I'll list a dozen or so of the Times Square hotels that offer the best value for money spent.

$$ The unpretentious **Hotel St. James** (109 W. 45th St., between Sixth Ave. and Broadway; ☎ 888/311-2978 or 212/869-7329; 1, 2, 3, N, Q, R, S to Times Sq.), with consistent year-round pricing, is about the least costly decent hotel you can find in this pricey area, and offers one of the best deals in the city for rooms with private bathrooms: just $115 per night for a double. For a room with two doubles, big enough to sleep four, the price is a still good $140. Now, you ain't getting the Taj Mahal here; the rooms look a bit like they were designed by someone wearing a blindfold, with an exposed radiator in each, one wall painted an odd shade of mint green, and the most standard type of laminated hotel furniture (in one room, there are two framed pictures on the wall . . . both of the same landscape by Monet). That being said, the rooms are larger than usual and quite clean, with good beds, 30-channel cable TV, and full bathrooms. At this writing, there's no Internet connectivity in the rooms or breakfast served, but the friendly Russian women behind the desk assure me these are coming soon (hopefully, improvements won't cause them to raise rates). One word of advice: If you do stay here, ask for a room in the back of the hotel, as the street outside can get quite noisy.

$$–$$$ For its sheer audaciousness, but usually for a bit more in price, you may prefer **Hotel QT** ★★★ (125 W. 45th St., between Sixth Ave. and Broadway; ☎ 212/354-2323; www.hotelqt.com; 1, 2, 3, S, N, Q, R to Times Sq.), a hyper-chic, startlingly friendly new budget property gambling that guests will care more about high design, sexy swimming pools, and posh bars than it will about bathroom doors (in some rooms there are none), closets (not in the smaller rooms), or dressers (also AWOL). The latest project of celebrity hotelier Andre Belazc (he's the man behind the trendy Standard Hotels in Los Angeles), who has said he wanted to create an "upscale youth hostel," it certainly has glamour to spare, especially in the lobby area with its cedar-decked pool, complete with swim-up bar and deejay. The rooms are eye candy as well, each featuring tall platform beds, or

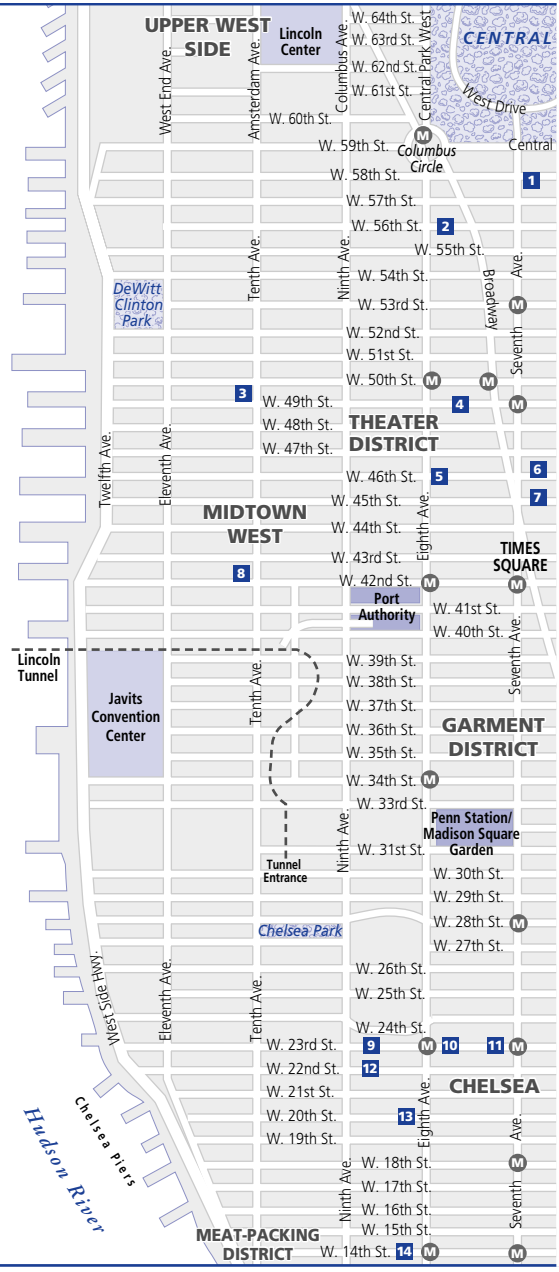
platform beds with bunk beds overhead (terrific choices for families) topped with cloudlike cream-and-tan duvets. A flatscreen TV with DVD player faces the bed. Despite the hostel comment, each room has its own toilet and shower (no bathtubs here), with Kiss My Face bath products; there's also a fridge in the room that you can stock at the front desk, which doubles as a canteen selling tiny bottles of booze, bags of chips, suntan lotion, city maps, magazines . . . you name it. Despite the glitz of it all, 10 of the rooms—small doubles—cost just $125 per night, year-round; for slightly larger rooms, the rate jumps to $165. Rooms big enough for a family (with two twin beds or a king with bunk bed) cost $185. The most expensive room in the hotel is $285, still a decent deal in New York. All rates include use of the on-site gym and sauna rooms, free WiFi, plus a continental breakfast served in a, yes, chic breakfast room with skylights and striped lounge chairs.

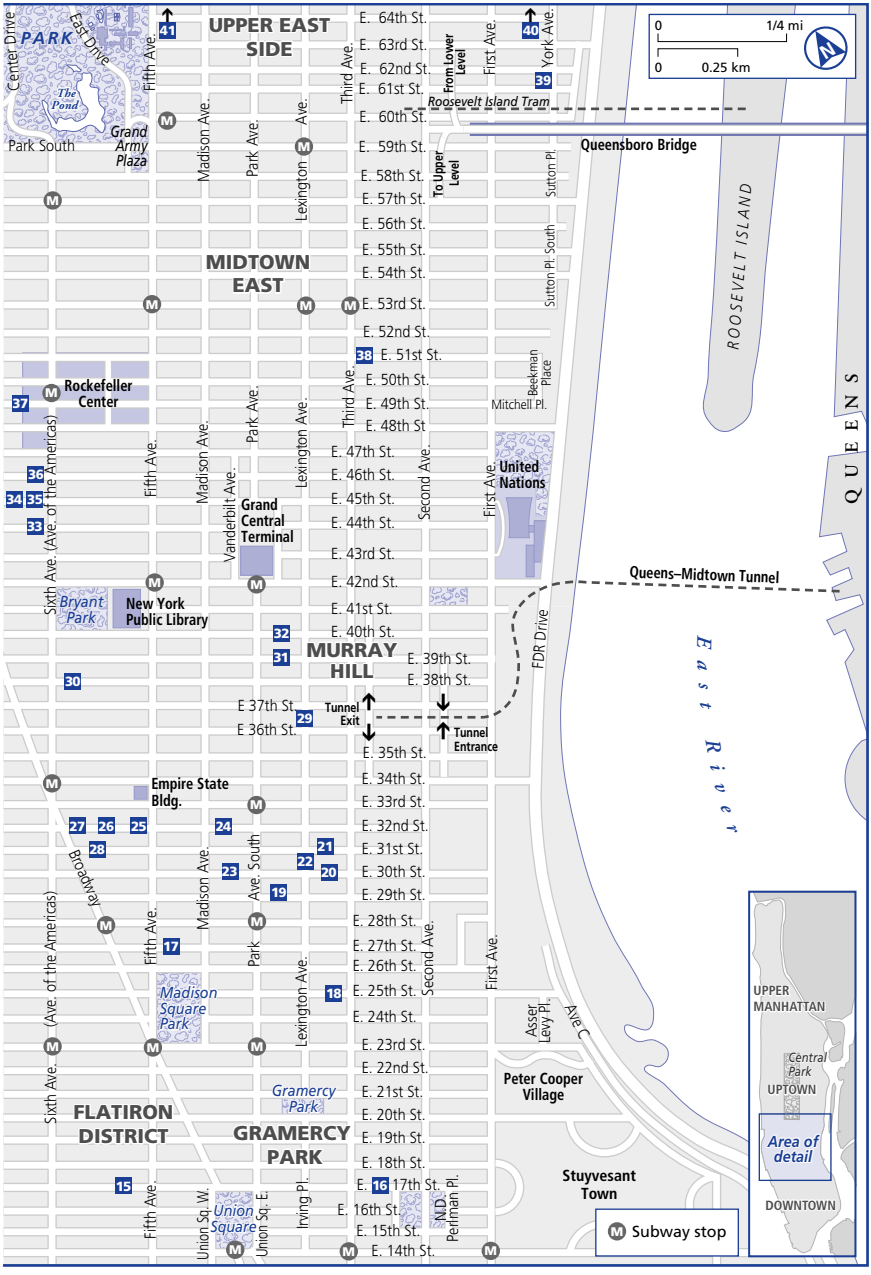
$$–$$$ Another good choice, though without the same "cool quotient" as the QT, is **Radio City Apartments** (142 W. 49th St., near Sixth Ave.; ☎ 877/921-9321 or 212/730-0728; www.radiocityapartments; N, R, Q to 49th or B, D to Rockefeller Center St.), which are notable for their size: large studios (from $109 per night in summer, January, and February; $139 in spring; $155 otherwise), even larger one-bedrooms ($149/$185/$205), and positively enormous two-bedroom units ($235–$275), which have been created from what were previously actual apartments for long-term tenants. Each comes with a fully workable kitchen with pots, pans, plates, full-size fridge, oven, and burners; and even the smallest units are big enough to accommodate a family of four on two full-sized beds. The two-bedrooms, which come with a pullout couch, can easily accommodate six or seven, with abundant privacy for all. Though the decor is dowdy, with laminated furniture and dark, stain-hiding carpets, bedspreads, and curtains, the rooms and good-sized bathrooms are kept spotlessly clean and the mattresses are solid and comfortable. I also like the location on a relatively calm Midtown street within tap-dancing distance of both Broadway and Radio City Music Hall; and the staff, a wry, friendly bunch who go beyond the call of duty to make guests feel comfortable (when I recently asked Dave, the check-in clerk, if anything was complimentary beyond daily newspapers in the lobby, he replied with a wink, "Only our good humor").

$–$$$$ Nearby, there's **Super 8 Times Sq.** (59 W. 46th St., near Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/719-2300; www.super8.com; N, R, Q to 49th St.), part of the Apple Core group, which prides itself on providing luxe amenities at proletarian prices. Problem is, sometimes its rates are good, and sometimes they're pretty, well, luxe—with certain dates in the summer, fall, and early winter rising to a hefty $179 for a very simple though well-proportioned motel-like room that's clean and faceless but with a firm bed, a roomy closet (with a full ironing board and iron), and a bathroom. The amenities they like to tout include an exercise room on property (good only for cardio as there are no weights), a concierge desk, and a downright opulent continental breakfast served each morning, with such goodies as doughnuts, bagels, cereals, fresh fruits, and pastries. If you hit it right, it can be a terrific deal at just $89 per night. If not . . . well, you get the picture.

Midtown, Chelsea, Union Square & Flatiron District Accommodations

- Americana Inn **30**
- Bentley Hotel **39**
- Big Apple Hostel **35**
- Broadway Inn **5**
- Carlton Arms **18**
- Chelsea Inn **15**
- Chelsea Lodge **13**
- Chelsea Pines Inn **14**
- Chelsea Savoy Hotel **11**
- City Club Hotel **33**
- Colonial House Inn **12**
- Comfort Inn Midtown **6**
- Da Vinci Hotel **2**
- Gershwin Hotel **17**
- Gracie Inn **40**
- Herald Square Hotel **28**
- Hotel 17 **16**
- Hotel 30 30 **23**
- Hotel 31 **21**
- Hotel Bedford **32**
- Hotel Chelsea **10**
- Hotel Deauville **19**
- Hotel Grand Union **24**
- Hotel QT **7**
- Hotel Stanford **27**
- Hotel St. James **34**
- House of the Redeemer **41**
- La Quinta **26**
- Leo House **9**
- Mayfair Hotel **4**
- Murray Hill East Suites **31**
- Murray Hill Inn **20**
- Park Savoy **1**
- Pickwick Arms **38**
- Radio City Apartments **37**
- Ramada Inn Eastside **22**
- Red Roof Inn **25**
- Skyline Hotel **3**
- Soldiers', Sailors', Marines' and Airmens' Club **29**
- Super 8 Times Square **36**
- Travel Inn **8**




PARK
Center Drive
East Drive
The Pond
Grand Army Plaza
Park South
Fifth Ave.
Madison Ave.
Park Ave.
Lexington Ave.
Third Ave.
UPPER EAST SIDE
MIDTOWN EAST
MURRAY HILL
FLATIRON DISTRICT
GRAMERCY PARK
Rockefeller Center
Sixth Ave. (Ave. of the Americas)
Bryant Park
New York Public Library
Grand Central Terminal
Vanderbilt Ave.
Second Ave.
First Ave.
United Nations
Beekman Place
Mitchell Pl.
Sutton Pl.
Sutton Pl. South
York Ave.
From Lower Level
To Upper Level
Roosevelt Island Tram
Queensboro Bridge
ROOSEVELT ISLAND
QUEENS
Queens–Midtown Tunnel
FDR Drive
East River
Tunnel Exit
Tunnel Entrance
E. 64th St.
E. 63rd St.
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E. 16th St.
E. 15th St.
E. 14th St.
Empire State Bldg.
Broadway
Madison Square Park
Gramercy Park
Union Square
Union Sq. W.
Union Sq. E.
Irving Pl.
N.D. Perlman Pl.
Asser Levy Pl.
Ave C
Peter Cooper Village
Stuyvesant Town
UPPER MANHATTAN
Central Park
UPTOWN
Area of detail
DOWNTOWN
Subway stop
0 1/4 mi
0 0.25 km

Bringing the Kids

Children are welcomed at hotels across the city. Those under the age of 12 never incur a charge when sharing rooms with their parents.

$$–$$$ Just west of the Radio City Apartments, on a block that also houses the Majestic Theater and Eugene O'Neill Theater (and the crowds that descend on them eight times a week), the **Mayfair Hotel** (242 W. 49th St., between Broadway and Eighth Ave.; ☎ 800/556-0300 or 212/586-0300; www.mayfairnewyork.com; N, R, O to 49th St.) bills itself a "European-style, boutique hotel," which I've found to be the code phrase for "Our rooms are very small, but they sure do look pretty." That's certainly the case here, with rooms that are oddly shaped, usually opening onto a tiny alcove area with a doorway to the bathroom, behind which is wedged a full or queen-size bed and a small desk. Pretty comes into the equation with the Wedgwood china–like bedspreads and curtains, white with either baby blue or pink scenes of peasants at play; the nice new carpeting; and the wooden shutters on the windows (which don't entirely shut out the noise when the theater is getting out—I suggest asking for a room that faces the back). Other tasteful touches include the black-and-white photos of Broadway and movie stars of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, on loan from the Museum of the City of New York, which adorn the hallways and wood-paneled lobby. As with many Theater District hotels, rates rise sharply on the weekends, bringing the cost of a single room up from $120 to (occasionally) $185 in the summer and deep winter; and a double from $140 to $210 during those same periods. During the popular fall and spring periods and at holiday times, single rooms can start at $175, with doubles going for $210, but usually even during these pricey periods you'll pay less than that (the desk clerk is almost always willing to play "let's make a deal," so do your best to bargain).

$$$–$$$$ Though no longer a budget option—it's raised its prices too high in the last 2 years to still fit into that category—**Broadway Inn** (264 W. 46th St. off Eighth Ave.; ☎ 800/826-6300 or 212/997-9200; www.broadwayinn.com; 1, 2, 3, S, N, O, R to Times Sq. or A, E, C to 42nd St.) still offers tremendous value, especially for those who take service seriously. Owner Barbara Milner is a whirlwind of hospitality: She personally inspects each room every day, takes calls from lost tourists she helps direct around the city, and gives each guest a printout (and an e-mail in advance of arrival) of all of the Broadway and Off-Broadway shows for which she can get discounts of 40%, proudly noting that her guests never have to resort to the TKTS line. She also has a policy of never "walking" a guest, meaning that unlike 80% of the hotels in New York, a reservation here is firm: You won't show up and be told there's no room at the inn and taken to another property. (The downside of this policy is that guests must cancel 2 weeks before arrival, or lose their deposit, though Milner will give credit or even refunds in family emergencies.) The guesthouse itself is reminiscent of a Vermont inn, especially the lobby/breakfast room with its fireplace, comfortable armchairs and couches, and hardcover book–filled shelves. Rooms are cheerful and light-filled, with good-quality beds, director's chairs and a table (in some), nice-sized closets,

and private bathrooms. They vary greatly in size, but none are what I'd call cramped. Rates, as I said, have gone up of late, but start at $125 for a single, going up to as much as $225 during the busy fall period, and even higher for holidays. Doubles go from $160 all the way up to $375 in the busy November and early December shopping period, but tend to average $225. Because so many of the guests here are "returnees," the Broadway Inn doesn't work with any online discounters, and its rates tend to stick pretty close to what's listed on its website (where you can get a full breakdown of prices by season).

$–$$$$ Another mid-range option is the **Comfort Inn Midtown** (129 W. 46th St., between Broadway and Sixth Ave.; ☎ 800/517-8364 or 212/221-2600; www.applecorehotels.com; B, D, F, V to 47th St. or N, R to 49th St.), which is part of the Apple Core Group, but tends to charge $20 to $30 more per night than its brethren (meaning that its rooms often cost as much as $200 though they can drop to $89). I've been puzzling over why I can come up with only two reasons for the higher price: 1) the central location, which is just a half-block from Times Square; and 2) the shower curtains, which are curved in the way they are in ultra-deluxe hotels, allowing you to bathe without ever, heaven forbid, touching the curtain. Other than that, it's pretty much indistinguishable from the other Apple Cores in that it has larger-than-standard rooms, good beds, a pleasant decor, a tiny gym on-site (three cardio machines), and a sugar-loaded continental breakfast, heavy on donuts and pastries. I'm including this place as an option because of its location and comfort level, but unless you're really shower-curtain-phobic, you'll get better value for your dollar at the Red Roof Inn (p. 39) and La Quinta (p. 39) in the Herald Square area.

$$$$ City Club Hotel ★★ (55 W. 44th St., between Broadway and Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/921-5500; www.cityclubhotel.com; 1, 2, 3, S to Times Sq.) is a splurge pick, this time for folks looking for a bit of romance. A small sliver of a building, right next to the historic (and more expensive) Algonquin, it was created by Jeffrey Bilhuber, who is best known for designing the homes of celebrities such as Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein. In fact, the hotel looks like it was designed *for* CK himself—it has the same luxurious minimalism that his clothes and housewares do. All of the rooms are oversized with ribbed walls (a mixture of canvas and plaster), ultra-suede daybeds by the window, brown cork floors, and luxurious black marble bathrooms. In a whizbang move, the TV is hidden behind a tall rectangular mirror across from the bed; turn it on, and it glows its way through the glass. Mattresses are custom made and heavenly, as is the high-powered shower. But best of all—and what makes this such a mecca for romance—is the room

Staying Connected to the Internet

High-speed Internet access either through cables or via WiFi is now a given at every non-hostel-type hotel in Manhattan. I only mention this amenity at the hotels that offer the service for free; all the rest charge a standard $9.95 per day for Internet access.

service, which comes (at breakfast and dinner) from top chef Daniel Boulud's restaurant DB Bistro Moderne, which inhabits the first floor of the hotel. Like the DoubleTree Guest Suites, rooms start at $250 per night (including workouts at the nearby New York Sports Club), but during really busy periods they can soar even higher to a gasp-inducing $475. That being said, in the period when prices are *supposed* to be this high, I've found them for $100 less at such websites as **www.express-res.com** (so do some Web surfing before you book).

HELL'S KITCHEN—AN OUTER PART OF TIMES SQUARE

$$–$$$ In an area of Manhattan that could be best described as "Siberia," the **Skyline Hotel** ★ kids (725 Tenth Ave. at 49th St.; ☎ 800/433-1982 or 212/586-3500; www.skylinehotelny.com; C, E to 50th St.) does its best to offset its dreary location with a cluster of amenities that can only be replicated at one other hotel in the city (see the Travel Inn, below). First off, the Skyline has that rarest of all luxuries, prized by families and fitness buffs alike: a swimming pool, and a nice one at that, located on the roof of the hotel, but indoors. The lobby, a tony space, boasts a large on-site restaurant, a cocktail bar, and a gift shop where you can also pick up such necessities as suntan lotion and tampons. Guests can store cars or vans for a mere $8 per day in the hotel's basement parking lot. And the rooms are enormous by New York standards, are clean and comfortable, and come with such nice extras as Nintendo games and WiFi. In the newly renovated (and pricier) area of the hotel, rooms range from $149 to $229, depending on the room size and time of year; rooms in this section come with plush duvets, dark wood furniture, and braided leather headboards. But I'd go for the standard rooms, which are a bit more old-fashioned in their appearance but just as comfortable and large—and about $40 less expensive. The major decision you have to make is whether you want to be staying in this faceless, somewhat industrial neighborhood, which is a long two-avenue walk from the nearest subways.

$$–$$$ Travel Inn ★★ kids (515 W. 42nd St., near Tenth Ave.; ☎ 800/869-4630 or 212/695-7171; www.newyorkhotel; A, E, C, 7 to 42nd St.) is a dead ringer for the Skyline (see above), but with a few important differences. Like the Skyline, it has a pool, a gym, and parking facilities, but it one-ups its rival with the size of its pool (a summer-only facility about twice as large as its rival's, with half of its length outdoors and surrounded by lounge chairs), its gym (also a hair bigger), and the fact that it gives guests free parking—a very, very rare perk in this parking-poor city. The rooms are renovated each year and are therefore immaculate, with good firm mattresses and a standard motel look, but they're markedly smaller than Skyline's though the prices are similar. Here a room with a queen-size bed or two doubles will start at $125, going up to as much as $165 during the peak fall and winter season (at most times of the year they cost $150). Rooms with king beds are about $25 more, but come with fridges and microwaves. In an unusually generous gesture, the hotel allows kids up to the age of 16 (rather than the usual 12) to stay free when sharing rooms with their parents. Locale? Though it's as far west as the Skyline, in this area of town the Off-Broadway theaters crawl down 42nd Street all the way to Tenth Avenue, so it feels less remote (though it's still a long walk to the nearest subway).

A Tale of Three Seasons

Conventions affect hotel prices, as do holidays, but in general, three seasons dictate how much you'll spend on a Manhattan bed.

January 10 through the end of February is the cheapest time to visit New York City by far, when rates (and temperatures) hit bottom.

September, October, November, and December, when the city is swarming with shoppers and businesspeople, is the peak season, with rates reaching their pinnacle the week the "Big Ball" drops.

The rest of the year comprises a hazy "middle season" with summer rates traditionally dropping near deep-winter prices, though that practice may be disappearing thanks to the increasing popularity of New York in June, July, and even sweltering August.

MIDTOWN WEST: NEAR HERALD SQUARE

Just south of Times Square, but still in the middle swath of Manhattan known as "Midtown," is the heavily commercial district whose prime locations are the Empire State Building and Macy's department store—the latter is on Herald Square. Just as crowded and manic as the Theater District during the day, the area tends to empty out at night when the office workers and shoppers go home, affording visitors to this area some much-needed quiet. There are many budget choices in this area; I've tried to narrow the field to those that give the best value.

$–$$ Hard-core budgeteers—but those who value their sleep—would do well to consider the **Americana Inn** (69 W. 38th St., just off Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/840-6700; N, Q, R, B, D, F to 34th St.). This is another bathless wonder: Here three to four rooms share a bathroom with shower (though rooms do come with sinks), and the rates are among the lowest in the city, costing as little as $75 to $85 for a single, $105 for a double, and $115 to $120 for a room with two double beds. Though you're paying very little for small rooms with little decoration beyond a TV set (basic, no cable), a direct-dial phone, and well-worn wooden furniture, you're getting something very unusual at this price level: a high-quality, eminently sleepable-mattress. In fact, these are some of the best mattresses I've encountered in this price range. To ensure that you get the most out of that superb mattress, make sure that you ask for a room in the back, away from the street noise. The other nice perk here is the kitchenette on each floor available for guest use (along with coffeemakers).

$–$$ I also very much like the **Herald Square Hotel** (19 W. 31st St. between Fifth Ave. and Broadway; ☎ 800/727-1888 or 212/279-4017; www.heraldsquarehotel.com; N, Q, R, B, D, F to Herald Sq./34th St.), but what an emotional roller-coaster it puts its guests on! The outside is promising, a lovely Beaux Arts facade complete with gold-leaf cherub, but once you enter you're confronted with

Turning to the Web for a Hotel Discount

Before going to the Web, it's important that you know what "flavor" of discount you're seeking. Currently, there are two types of online reductions, good for two very different types of hotels:

1. Discounts on the hotel's website itself
2. Discounts on outside sites such as **hotels.com**, **quikbook.com**, **Expedia.com**, and the like

The first type of discount is most common at the large "chain" hotels such as Best Western, Holiday Inn, and the W Hotels. About 4 years ago, these chains (and others) pledged to the public that they would not be undercut by outside agencies such as Orbitz, Expedia, and Travelocity, and for once, corporate America was true to its word. Within months these companies started offering better or equal prices on their own websites. So if you have a particular hotel in mind that's a member of a national chain, it's always best to simply go to that chain's website to book.

If you don't know which chain hotel you prefer, you can turn to an "aggregator" site such as **Sidestep.com**, **Kayak.com**, or **Mobissimo.com**. These three sites perform a "spider search" of all of the big chains' websites (and some independent hotels as well) and will return a list of options, from cheapest to most expensive, of rates that you may not find on Expedia, Orbitz, Travelocity, and the other online travel agencies. These aggregators also have the ability to "winnow" your search by the type of amenities you want (free breakfast, pool, Internet access) as well as location. **Travelaxe.com**, another top site, works in a similar way, searching not only the hotel chains but the discounters' sites as well. The only drawback to this online tool is that you must download it to your hard drive. If you're a frequent traveler, I'd recommend you use it; no spyware will be installed, Travelaxe is ethical about privacy issues, and its side-by-side searches can be a savings boon.

So you can stop surfing there, right? I wish. It's now the better part of wisdom to check a couple of online discounters as well. Companies such as **Hotels.com**, **Quikbook, Last Minute Travel**, and **Express-res.com** have taken to buying New York hotel rooms in bulk and then reselling them at a discount. You won't find these discounts through an aggregator site; instead, you'll need to search the sites individually. (In fact, the only way to book a room at one or two hotels—Astor on the Park being a prime example—is through LastMinuteTravel.com, as it has bought up every single room in the hotel for the coming year.)

It's a lot of surfing, I know, but in the hothouse world of Big Apple hotel pricing, this sort of diligence can pay off.

that most ominous of hotel sights: a bullet-proof, glass-encased check-in desk. Turns out that's merely a holdover from the bad old days when this was a welfare hotel, but what a terrible first impression it makes! Of course, first impressions aren't everything, and the solicitous staff and tremendously spiffy rooms should soon dispel any lingering worries. The hotel was in the midst of a major renovation when I last visited in 2005 and improvements were made throughout. In the most expensive rooms (at published rates of between $149 and $169 a night, but sometimes dropping as low as $125), the rugs are now a textured tan, the mattresses have comfy pillow-tops, there are CD players and flatscreen TVs, and the beds are swathed with white duvets (the last touch an unmistakable sign that the hotel's trying to move up). Although the smaller, cheaper rooms are nowhere near as *au courant* in their appearance or amenities (you'll find the standard, extra-firm, plastic-covered beds here), they're white-glove clean and pleasantly decorated with pink-flowered bedspreads and framed *Life* magazine covers (the building was erected in 1894 to house the magazine's offices and staff—some of whom lived on-site in bachelor apartments on the top floors). Small standard rooms with private bathroom, cable TV, and free WiFi start for as little as $119, and singles with private facilities cost just $89. If you're on a severe budget, tiny but serviceable singles with shared facilities are available for a mere $69 a night (ask for one with a sink; some have them, some don't).

$–$$ One short block away, **The Hotel Stanford** (43 W. 32nd St. between Fifth Ave. and Broadway; ☎ 800/365-1114 or 212/563-1400; www.hotelstanford.com; Ⓝ, Ⓡ, Ⓠ, Ⓑ, Ⓓ, Ⓕ to 34th St.) seems to attract a mostly Korean clientele; according to the staff, about 70% of the guests here come from Asia. They get a hotel that's a smidgeon of a step below the Red Roof and La Quinta (see below), both in quality and price. Like its competitors on the eastern end of the block, the Stanford offers rooms with ample space and private facilities, but you'll find a chip on the furniture here, a mark on the wall there, small distractions (such as the weirdly stiff foam pillows on otherwise comfortable beds) that keep it firmly in second place in the race to quality sleeps. It also does not offer gym facilities, and its free breakfast is much more minimal. Like the Apple Cores, the Stanford charges $89 to $99 in slow periods, but in pricey autumn, its rates tend to stay more grounded, occasionally ascending to $169 but much more likely to be in the $129 to $149 range for standard doubles. There are also rooms with queen-size beds for $10 more, rooms with two double beds for another $10, king-bed rooms starting at $149, and one-room suites with rates starting at $179 (the published rates are higher, but are never charged here).

$–$$$ Of higher quality, in my view, are the two Apple Core Hotels that sit opposite one another on West 32nd Street (otherwise known as "Little Korea" for its abundance of grill-your-own-dinner spots, nail salons, and other Korean businesses). **La Quinta Inn** ★★ (17 W. 32nd St., Fifth Ave. and Broadway; ☎ 800/567-7720 or 212/736-1600; Ⓝ, Ⓡ, Ⓠ, Ⓑ, Ⓓ, Ⓕ to 34th St.; www.applecorehotels.com) and **Red Roof Inn** ★★ (6 W. 32nd St.; ☎ 800/755-3194 or 212/643-7100; subway and website same as La Quinta Inn's), though nominally members of different chains, are twins in the quality of their rooms (high) and pricing (which, like the other Apple Cores, ping-pongs more than I'd like). Though both have

pleasant lobbies with Art Deco touches (La Quinta's may have the edge as it offers a handy gift shop), the rooms turn neo-Georgian in their design, and are capacious, surprisingly elegant spaces, with lovely floral bedspreads, and curtains and chairs covered with heavy woven fabric of a quality you'd expect to find at a more expensive hotel. Both hotels have free WiFi, Nintendo, and cable in their guest rooms; crisp white private bathrooms with full tubs; decent closet space; complimentary breakfast; and good-sized cardio workout rooms with TVs. And the prices? Well, if you hit it right you could be paying just $89 a night for your digs, but those same rooms can cost $179 when the city's busy. On average, you'll pay $139 to $149.

A MID-RANGE PICK

$$$–$$$$ Though technically on the East Side (it's east of Fifth Ave.), **Hotel Thirty Thirty** ★ (30 E. 30th St., between Park Avenue South and Madison Ave.; ☎ 800/497-6028 or 212/689-1900; www.thirtythirty-nyc.com; 6 to 33rd St.) belongs to the Empire State Building district, and used to be a true budget lodging, like so many others in this area. But in the past 5 years it's undergone a serious upgrade, transforming itself utterly from its former life as the Martha Washington Residence for Women (though 70 women from those days still live on the premises). Now, the hotel has a chic color palette (all tans, whites, and deep purples), strawlike wallpaper, and comfortably firm beds. But it couldn't change the size of the standard rooms, which remain extremely small (somehow they seem tinier now that they cost between $149 and $179 a night). There are larger rooms, of course, but you'll pay between $20 and $50 more to stay in them, bringing the cost up, in some cases, to $219 a night, which is a bit high for a hotel without room service or a gym (though to be fair, guests can use the nearby full-service Synergy gym for free). There's also a teddy bear in each room, though I'm not exactly sure that's a selling point (or why management felt they needed this cutesy ploy). My advice: Choose this hotel if you can get a deal on the rate, as it's a pleasant, well-located option; otherwise, skip it.

MIDTOWN WEST: NEAR COLUMBUS CIRCLE

This section of Midtown, close to Carnegie Hall and the Time Warner Center, is a short walk north of Times Square. The proximity of Central Park makes this a pleasant area to lodge in, though it's primarily a business district, meaning that many local stores are shuttered over the weekend and that restaurants can get mighty crowded at lunchtime. Drawbacks aside, a number of subway lines service the area, and Fifth Avenue's best window-shopping is just a stroll away.

$–$$ When I was making my most recent visit to the **Park Savoy** ★ (158 W. 58th St., between Sixth and Seventh aves.; ☎ 212/245-5755; http://parksavoy hotel.com; N, Q, R to 57th St.) for this guidebook, I met another guest who figured out what I was doing there (I guess not that many guests wander around taking notes). He told me, with a disconcerting grin, that he was in town because his sister had died, but that he "couldn't be happier with the hotel." It seemed an odd time to be happy about anything, but I could see why he was pleased: The location is prime, just 1 block off the Park behind the much pricier hotels that line Central Park South.

And the rooms, while unpretentious and small—in a room with just one double bed, I measured a mere 1½ feet between the bed and the wall—were neat and well-tended, offering desk, dresser, cable TV, and fridge. The staff is gracious and the price *so* right at just $95 to $115 for a room with one double bed and private bathroom (depending on season), and between $115 and $155 for much larger digs with two beds and a private bathroom. My only quibbles with the place are the beds, which were overly firm for my taste (though not lumpy); and the ugly brown and orange color scheme in some of the rooms, which remind me of a cheap diner.

$–$$$ A second establishment that deserves a hearty recommendation is **Da Vinci Hotel** (244 W. 56th St., between Broadway and Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/489-4100; www.davincihotel.com; N, R to 57th St., or 1, A, C, B, D to Columbus Circle), which offers surprisingly good rooms for quite moderate rates. In fact, mid-week sleeps in one-bedded doubles start at just $90 a night in mid-January, creeping up to $100 in February. These same rooms cost $110 in March, July, and August, increasing by $10 in June and September, and then bobbling between $130 and $150 the rest of the year (weekends are generally $30 higher). For rooms with two double beds, expect to pay $20 more per night on weekdays, and $30 more on weekends. Prices include a modest continental breakfast. What do you get for your outlay? Extremely clean rooms and bathrooms, a solicitous staff, firm beds, and worn but serviceable furnishings: a small fridge, an armchair, a desk, and a phone with message service. The only disappointments here are the lighting, which is as dim as you'll find in the "get 'em out of their rooms and into the casino" hotels of Vegas; and the hotel's unusual family policy of allowing free stays only to guests under the age of 6.

MIDTOWN EAST

For a quieter but still central location, the area east of Fifth Avenue (but not too far east, as you want to be near a subway) may be a good alternative to the bustle and buzz that is the West 30s, 40s, and 50s. The downside to this elegant district is that it can be a bit dull, but good transportation options can whisk you away in an instant.

$–$$ Visiting **Hotel 31** (120 E. 31st St., off Lexington Ave.; ☎ 212/685-3060; www.hotel31.com; 6 to 33rd St.) is déjà vu all over again for me (to quote Yogi Berra), as it's a near replica of its sister hotel, from the unimaginative name (that one's the Hotel 17, because it's on, you guessed it, 17th St.) to the winding, dimly lit hallways and cramped lobby. As at the "17," "31" has a somewhat Victorian look, but the upkeep seems more consistent here; all of the rooms I've visited are tidy, with unsaggy beds (a problem in a few of the rooms at 17). Just like the downtown version, you'll have to share a bathroom, with four rooms using one toilet and a shower. Rooms start at $75 per night in January and February, but the desk clerk once let me in on a little secret: At that time of year, such companies as Expedia and Hotels.com get these same rooms for just $50 and mark them up to $70. If you offer $60 during a slow period, your "bid" just may be accepted. But don't try that during September or October when the United Nations rents out almost the entire hotel; rooms are at a premium then and through the Christmas holidays, with these very basic lodgings going for as much as $140.

$–$$ Right around the corner from Hotel 31 is the **Ramada Inn Eastside** (161 Lexington Ave., between 31st and 30th sts.; ☎ 800/567-7720 or 212/545-1800; www.ramada.com; 6 to 33rd St.), the least expensive of the "Apple Core" chain hotels. Although its rates won't drop below $89 a night—the lowest deep-winter and sultry-summer rate for a standard double—they usually go for about $10 less than the Super 8 Times Square, La Quinta, Red Roof, or Days Inn (see above), because of the Ramada's less-popular location and lack of a concierge. Expect to pay an average of $139 per night here, though prices can drop and rise further. Like the other Apple Core hotels, room rates include a hearty continental breakfast and use of an on-site gym (this one's particularly small, with just a treadmill, a step-machine, and a stationary bike—and no TV). Rooms are simple and clean, but of a good size, with such nice extras as two phones in some rooms and Nintendo games on the TVs. The bathrooms, like the guest rooms, are midsize and spotless.

$–$$$ The very best budget option in the neighborhood, **The Pickwick Arms** (230 E. 51st St., off Third Ave.; ☎ 800/PICKWIK or 212/355-0300; www.pickwickarms.com; 6 to 50th St.) was in the midst of a major renovation when I last visited, which promises to make it one of the most unusual of New York's affordable hotels, marrying high style and gee-whiz technology with low prices. The new rooms—all are expected to be complete by spring of 2006—will have a very Scandinavian look, with clean-lined light wood and brushed metal furnishings, bedspreads in primary colors, fine modern prints on the walls, and such non-budget touches as flatscreen TVs, free WiFi, CD players, and iPod recharging stations in each room. As before, most of the rooms will be pretty small—combining and enlarging them would have forced the owners to raise prices—and some still do share a bathroom, but even these negatives don't detract too much. The designer has done a bang-up job of making smart use of the space, building dressers into the bases of the beds, for example, and attaching small TVs at each level of the bunk beds. Though at the time of this writing, rates were still in flux, the management expects that rooms with bunk beds and small singles without private bathroom will cost $99 to $125 per night; small double rooms with shower and toilet (and you can't be shy in these rooms, as the shower is behind a glass wall that looks directly into the bedroom) will probably go for between $149 and $179 a night, and larger queen-bed rooms with more private facilities will be priced at $145 to $155 a night. There will also be combination queen-bed and bunk-bed suites, created by opening a door between the two types of rooms—ideal for families. And as always seems to happen with a renovation these days, the roof is being transformed into a bar with a view.

$–$$$ Also newly renovated, **Murray Hill Inn** (143 E. 30th St. between Lexington and Third aves.; ☎ 212/683-6900; www.nyinns.com; 6 to 33rd St.) is not quite as stylish as the Pickwick, but it's extremely comfortable, well-maintained, and affordable. Here most of the rooms have sleek hardwood floors, snazzy newly tiled bathrooms, and satellite TVs that get about 60 different stations. The simplest of rooms, with somewhat old-fashioned furnishings, are the small doubles with full-size beds that go for between $89 and $129 per night; slightly larger doubles are $10 more. There are also chic new "superior" rooms with flatscreen

TVs, neo-Shaker dark wood furniture, swirling gold bedspreads (of the type you usually see at pricier properties), and again, brand-new bathrooms. These go for between $119 and $139 in January and February (the higher prices are for weekend stays), and $149 and $169 in the popular fall months. There are also two small doubles on the property that share a bathroom and go for $79 year-round. Prices include a coupon for a continental breakfast at a nearby deli. For those who like to exercise, the Murray Hill can arrange $10 workouts at a local gym. If you have limited mobility, be sure to ask for a room on the first floor, as the building has no elevator.

MID-RANGE TO "SENSIBLE SPLURGE" CHOICES (DEPENDING ON THE TIME OF YEAR)

$$$–$$$$ Convenient to Grand Central Station, **Hotel Bedford** ★ kids (118 E. 40th St. between Park and Lexington aves.; ☎ 800/221-6881 or 212/697-4800; www.bedfordhotel.com; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central Station) can best be described as a "striver." Its lobby wants to be (but really isn't) Edwardian, and the rooms, while unimaginatively furnished with standard-issue bedspreads, curtains, and furniture, offer many amenities that more expensive hotels often don't. First off, each and every room has a kitchen hidden behind a panel of accordion doors. In most cases these kitchens include stoves with burners; coffeemakers; real fridges: and full sets of dishes, plates, and cutlery (in some rooms, microwaves are subbed for the burners; but even in those rooms that don't have microwaves, they're free upon request). The rooms are big enough to easily accommodate a pullout couch or roll-away bed, the closets are all walk-in, and there's a handy-dandy pants-press in the room, along with an ironing board and iron. And if that weren't enough, all rooms have high-speed Internet access, the marble bathrooms are roomy and spotless, and there are washers and dryers in the basement. All in all, it's a pretty good deal, especially if you're able to snag one of these rooms for $139 a night (the price they often drop to on the Bedford's website); if not, expect to pay between $149 and $200. There are also suites that start at $155 a night, but these can go all the way to $255.

$$$–$$$$ Very similar to the Bedford but slightly more expensive, **The Murray Hill East Suites** ★ (149 E. 39th St., between Park and Lexington; ☎ 800/248-9999 or 212/661-2100; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central Station) offers apartment-like digs with even nicer kitchens (real walk-ins with full sets of flatware and silverware, cutting boards, pots, pans, spatulas, you name it); closets so big they'd make a native New Yorker jealous; and sunny, oversized rooms with comfortable beds, clean green carpets, and somewhat dowdy neo-Colonial wood furniture. The bathrooms are small but serviceable, the TVs are remote-control-less holdovers from the seventies, but other than that, these are unusually pleasant rooms. There's a good-size gym in the basement, with cardio machines, a weight machine, and free weights; and laundry facilities for guest use. My only complaints here (and the reason this property gets one star) are its officious desk staff and their policy of charging $20 extra for children, something no other hotel in New York, that I know of, does—and it's a real shame, too, because these suites are absolutely perfect for families, all equipped with good-quality fold-out beds. Rack rates run $199 to $269 for a large studio (depending on the season) and

$219 to $289 for a one-bedroom suite, but anyone who goes through Priceline, Hotels.com, or Orbitz tends to pay between $20 and $50 less per night.

CHELSEA

One of the most sought-after residential areas in the city, Chelsea has an unusually large number of friendly small guesthouses, places that go out of their way to create a homey atmosphere for visitors (see below). It's also a good choice for art lovers who wish to be near the gallery scene; and people who want to go to the all-out parties in the clubs and bars of this area or its offshoot, the trendy Meat Packing District.

$–$$ What do you get when you cross a traditional Greek Revival town house with a Midwestern hunting and fishing cabin? The result might be very close to what you find at the refreshingly original **Chelsea Lodge** ★★★ (318 W. 20th St., near Eighth Ave.; ☎ 800/373-1116 or 212/243-4499; www.chelsealodge.com; E, C to 23rd St.): an exceptionally well-kept and whimsical guesthouse in the heart of the neighborhood that bears its name. The only downside here is that, with the exception of four suites, guest rooms have only showers and sinks, with guests sharing toilets, one for every four rooms. But that seems like a small inconvenience for lodgings this charming and friendly. There's a down-home feel here, to be sure, with mounted swordfish and geese decoys overhanging the check-in desk, and brightly colored busts of Native Americans presiding over the stairs. Looking down from the walls are original hand-colored portraits of heaven-knows-who, giving that instant feeling of a family home, which is continued in the guest rooms with their gingham wallpaper, patchwork quilts on the beds, and Hershey kisses on each pillow. Rooms come equipped with free WiFi, useable desks, and flatscreen cable TVs. Nightly cost is $95 for single travelers, $110 for two—year-round (now, that's a refreshing change!). Deluxe rooms, with their own bathrooms and TV with VCR, are still quite reasonably priced at $135 for single occupancy, $150 double. Down the block, the hotel rents out two plainly furnished apartments with complete kitchens, which come in at $195 a night and can sleep up to four.

$–$$$ A similar and nearly as charming alternative is the **Chelsea Inn** ★ (46 W. 17th St., near Fifth Ave.; ☎ 800/640-6469 or 212/645-8989; www.chelseainn.com; Q, N, R, L, 4, 5, 6, L to Union Sq.), which straddles the border between two great neighborhoods, the Flatiron District and Chelsea. Like the Chelsea Lodge, some rooms have shared bathrooms (though at the Chelsea Inn, no more than two rooms share a toilet); and also like the Lodge, this one has a homey, friendly ambience, thanks to a decor of mismatched antique bedsteads, old wooden armoires, gracefully swooping curtains, and patchwork quilts on the firm beds—kind of like what you'd find in the home of an elderly aunt. Rates, which include continental breakfast at the small deli next door, start at just $89 a night in July, January, and December, peaking at $129, for the bathless rooms. Studio rooms with private facilities range from $129 to $179 during these periods, while a lovely two-room suite, big enough for a family and including a kitchenette, goes for between $179 and $259. Another nice touch: All rooms have small fridges and coffeemakers.

$–$$ A few doorways down from the famed Hotel Chelsea (see box below) is a hotel that is its opposite in every way imaginable, **Chelsea Savoy Hotel** ★ (204 W. 23rd St., off Seventh Ave; ☎ 212/929-9333; www.chelseasavoynyc.com; A, E, C to 23rd St.). Where the Hotel Chelsea is quirky and exciting, the Savoy is bland and standard (the decor is so unimaginative, you'll forget what your room looks like the moment you walk out the door). Where the Hotel Chelsea has a talkative, anecdote-spouting staff, the Savoy's is all business—not unfriendly, but certainly not warm. But where the Hotel Chelsea's prices are sky high (see below), the Savoy's are down to earth, with coffin-sized single rooms (yes, they're mighty small, but serviceable with private bathrooms) starting at just $99 during slow times, and peaking at $115; and well-proportioned doubles, again with private bathrooms, going from $125 to about $155 during really busy times (up to $195 over holiday periods). There are also quads from $145. And where the Hotel Chelsea is crumbling softly away in spots, with chipped paint and ancient carpets, the Savoy is neat as a pin, with good-quality beds and spacious bathrooms with bathtubs and showers. Which should you pick? If cost is an issue (and when isn't it?), choose the Savoy, and then go hang out in the lobby down the street, so you can take in the hipster vibe.

$$–$$$ The most welcoming hotel in the Chelsea area (and one of the friendliest in Manhattan), **Chelsea Pines Inn** ★★ (317 W. 14th St. near Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/929-1023; www.chelseapinesinn.org; A, E, C to 14th St.) is owned and run by Jay Lesiger, a native Brooklynite who seems bent on dispelling the myth that New Yorkers are cold and unfriendly. Jay bends over backwards to make sure guests enjoy their visit; along with personally baking a different loaf of bread for each morning's breakfast (it's served amidst an ample spread of bagels, fruits, and cereals), he and his staff publish a daily newsletter for guests covering walking tours, concerts, and other events happening that day. Jay also serves as concierge and is happy to make dinner reservations (he's worked out a 10% discount at some of the best local restaurants), book limousines, and get theater tickets, for which he takes no commission whatsoever (in fact, he scours the Web for cheaper seats for his guests). He and his partner opened the guesthouse in 1985 when it was a run-down boarding house. To hide the scarred walls (since renovated), Jay covered them with his large collection of movie posters, and the tradition stuck: Now each room is named after a different star and filled with movie memorabilia. Rooms are painted in pretty blues, greens, and lavenders and are larger than most NYC hotel digs, each with a small fridge, TV, safe, and phone. Beds are firm, comfortable, and topped with 300-thread-count sheets; and each front-facing room comes with a white-noise machine to block out street sounds. Deluxe rooms have queen-size beds and daybeds, as well as their own bathrooms, and cost between $139 and $179 depending on the season (deep winter is cheapest). Each economy room has its own shower and sink but shares a toilet (one for every two rooms); they cost between $119 and $159. Those who book 7 nights or more get $10 per night sliced off the rate. I'd recommend a room on the second or third floor, where the ceilings are higher. ***One final note:*** Though 70% of the guests at Chelsea Pines are gay, everyone is made to feel comfortable here, and I highly recommend this hotel for people of all orientations. It's a genuinely special place.

The Big Splurge: Sleeping with Janis & Dylan

"Some people stay here because they just want to be part of the history," Victor, the Hotel Chelsea's front desk clerk and jack-of-all-trades, once told me. "And we do a lot of connecting here. If I know you're in some industry, I'll introduce you to another guest in the same industry, so you can do some business. A lot of careers have been started here."

A tall boast for any hotel, but this isn't just any hotel, it's the famed **Hotel Chelsea** ★★ (222 W. 23rd St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/243-3700; www.chelseahotel.com; Ⓐ, Ⓒ, Ⓔ to 23rd St.; **$$$$**), still the artsy, eccentric, bohemian haunt it's always been. The list of past guests, many of whom did indeed start their careers here thanks to the people they met in the lobby, reads like a Who's Who of the American art scene. Though I don't have space to mention them all, Jimi Hendrix bedded here, as did Mark Twain, Arthur C. Clark, Hart Crane, Willem de Kooning, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, O. Henry, Dylan Thomas, Tennessee Williams, and William S. Burroughs. Joni Mitchell wrote her song "Chelsea Morning" here, and this is where Arthur Miller churned out two plays (as well as conceived daughter Rebecca Miller, a resident until recently). And guests not only bunked at the Chelsea, they left their mark, filling the hallways and the lushly curlicued Beaux Arts stairway with marvelous pieces of art, covering every single bit of wall space in some areas. The rooms are also individually and often artistically decorated, one splashed all over with bright primary colors as if Jackson Pollock had returned to life as a decorator.

All of this creativity comes at a price and though the carpets have seen better days and there are no sniffy amenities such as Jacuzzi tubs, a gym, or even chocolates on the pillows, nightly rates start at $210 for a small standard room, $275 for a studio with kitchen, and go up from there in high season.

$–$$$ A second choice among the gay guesthouses of the area (once again open to and welcoming of all) is **Colonial House Inn** ★ (318 W. 22nd St., between Eighth and Ninth aves.; ☎ 800/689-3779 or 212/243-9669; www.colonialhouseinn.com; Ⓐ, Ⓔ, Ⓒ to 14th St.), which has an ideal location along a lovely and quiet tree-lined street. Although the rooms are teeny-tiny, even for NYC, they are tidy and snug, decorated entirely in white, and filled with owner Mel Cheren's colorful, sometimes commanding, sometimes simply quirky paintings (look for pieces in the hallway that are lit by black lights). Economy and standard rooms share a shower and toilet (only a few steps away) but have their own sinks, in addition to 300-plus-channel cable TV, air-conditioning, a clock radio, and a private phone. These cost between $85 and $130 depending on the room size and day of the week (weekends are pricier). The larger deluxe rooms have their own facilities,

and some even have a fireplace (Duraflame logs only); they cost $130 on weekdays, $150 on holidays and weekends. Rates cover an expanded continental breakfast, including muffins freshly made by the night shift, which is served between 7am and noon in the pleasant lobby-cum-art gallery-cum Internet cafe (there's a high-speed Internet kiosk in one corner). There's also a nice roof deck with a clothing-optional section for those who take their tanning seriously.

UNION SQUARE, THE FLATIRON DISTRICT & GRAMERCY PARK

While not as picturesque as the Village (except for the streets directly abutting Gramercy Park), this is an exciting area for visitors, filled with top-notch restaurants and lively bars and clubs. Despite the bustle, the side streets where most of the hotels are tend to be quiet and calm.

$ Here is what has to be the simplest, plainest hotel in Manhattan (and proof positive that having a Madison Avenue address is no guarantee of posh digs). The **Madison Hotel** (62 Madison Ave., corner of 27th St.; ☎ 800/9-MADISON or 212/686-0092; www.madison-hotel.com; 6 to 28th St.) is bare-bones to the extreme, with thin sheets on the beds and the cheapest types of industrial rugs and furnishings. But someone here takes pride in the place, because the mattresses are good; and there's not a frayed bit of carpet to be found, nor a speck of dust, nor even a shoe mark against the bottom of a door. Prices are admirable as well at just $90 for a small double with private bathroom, $100 for larger digs, and $119 for a room with two double beds. (All of these rates include breakfast next door at the Bun Tikki Deli.) Rooms boast cable TV, phones, and air-conditioning. People with limited mobility should note that there's usually a step up into the bathroom that may make some of the rooms unusable—ask for a room that's all on one level. Though the lobby is forbidding, with the staff behind a wall of bullet-proof glass, the clientele on my visit seemed utterly respectable—mostly European tourists for whom "simple" doesn't translate as "scary."

$ In more or less the same low price range, **Hotel 17** (255 E. 17th St., near Third Ave.; ☎ 212/475-2845; www.hotel17ny.com; L to 3rd Ave., or 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R to Union Sq.) is very much an "only if the other places are full" choice in this neighborhood. Though its location is quite posh, right down the block from the only private park in Manhattan and the multi-million-dollar apartments and town house that surround it, the 17 has a hostel-like vibe, attracting an ever-changing cast of European and Australian backpackers (though there are no dorm rooms here). What attracts these budgeteers are low, low prices, with single rooms starting at $79 a night, doubles at $99 a night, and triples at $109 (weekend rates are $10 higher; winter rates will often drop by $10). As at the Larchmont, all rooms but three share toilets and showers, but unlike that far superior hotel, Hotel 17 has none of the extra touches—nice soaps, robes and slippers for guests, free breakfast—that make it special. And while this is a good pick for claustrophobics (the ceilings are higher than the norm; many of the guest rooms feature bay windows; and the triple rooms are positively huge, with room for two king-size beds, though currently they only house a double and a twin-size bed), some of the rooms are run-down, with sagging

A Surreal Stay in the Artful Apple

"I always tell the guests that if you ask us a question that starts with the words 'Do you have . . . ' the answer is always 'No,'" grins John Ogren, the droll, friendly manager of the **Carlton Arms Hotel** (160 E. 25th St. off Third Ave.; ☎ 212/679-0680; www.carltonarms.com; 6 to 23rd St.; **$–$$**). "Because, let's face it, our rooms don't have phones or TVs, nor do we have room service, an elevator, WiFi, or any of that other stuff."

Doesn't sound like much of an endorsement, right? Well, I'll start off by saying that this is not a place for everyone. If you expect a maid to change your sheets daily, or if you prefer a hotel with more than two phone lines (yes, you'll sometimes get a busy signal when you call), then this is not the hotel for you. But if you're the type who wants to try something really new, or who finds the idea of being cocooned in art interesting, then choose this 160-year-old hotel.

Over the years, the Carlton has invited artists to paint murals and create unusual environments in their guest rooms, which many have done with wild glee. There's the Egyptian Hallway, with mummy portraits of each of the staff members; the Japanese Room, with its elaborate dragons and Buddhas; and the Goth Room, where "she-male" portraits leer down at the occupants. It's a real looker, and some of the artfully painted rooms reach museum level in their artistry.

The Carlton Arms is also battling with the Madison Hotel (see above) for title of cheapest in this 'hood, with double rooms with private facilities going for a low $99 and singles for $85. There are also triple rooms at $120 and quads for $140. Those on very tight budgets can choose a room with shared bathroom and pay $10 to $15 below the regular rates.

couches that look like they were rescued from a frat house, and carpeting escaping the floorboards. My advice is to ask one of the friendly young staffers if they'll allow you to look at a couple of the rooms before you accept a room key, as they do vary wildly in terms of decor (all have a faux-Victorian feel) and upkeep—some are quite nice, others a bit dodgy. If you'd like to get a peek at the hotel before you come, rent Woody Allen's *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (Allen gets caught in the hotel's elevator in that flick).

$$–$$$ Now we move to a far more cushy selection. From a price-and-privacy point of view, you won't be able to do better in this neighborhood than **Hotel Grand Union** ★ (34 E. 32nd St., between Madison and Park aves.; ☎ 212/683-5890; www.grandunion.com; 6 to 33rd St.) or the Hotel Deauville (see below). The former is an older property that's nonetheless well preserved, each medium-sized room done up in dignified blues, grays, and plums, with a fridge, desk, small closet area, and tidy bathroom. Though the rooms don't get much sunlight and the beds don't have much give, they'll be fine for those who like to sleep late on

extra-firm mattresses. My only complaint would be the fluorescent lighting, but at just $100 a night (in Jan and Feb) for a room with a private bathroom, who am I to complain? The published rates are $130 to $150 for a standard full-bedded room (the bed is big enough for a couple, but they'll have to be very much in love), $155 to $175 for a room with two twins or three beds, and $180 to $200 for a quad, but you can usually bargain the manager down $20 to $30 or so (give it a try).

$–$$$ Hotel Deauville ★★ (103 E. 29th St., just off Park Ave.; ☎ 800/333-8843 or 212/683-0990; www.hoteldeauville.com; 6 to 33rd St.), another tidy tourist-class property, has really turned around since 2002, when current owner Mel Frielich took over. Before then, the elderly owners had let a number of problems fester (worn carpeting, hot water problems, a faulty reservations service—you'll see complaints about the hotel on Internet opinion sites), but the property boasts cushy new carpeting throughout, steady water pressure, and humble but extremely clean rooms with good-quality mattresses (not too hard, not too soft). The building was erected around 1912 as a luxury apartment building; consequently, there are rooms of all different sizes, but most have a tad more space than their competitors do, with gloriously high ceilings to boot. Furnishings are worn but serviceable. The hotel has one of the last few staffed elevators in the city, an elaborate birdcage-like beauty in service 24 hours a day. The solicitous staff really go beyond the call of duty to make their guests comfortable. The hotel has become a favorite of jazz musicians and it's not unusual to get a little concert in the afternoon when guests are practicing for an evening's performance. Rates vary widely by room type. There are small doubles with private bathrooms that go from $110 to $145 (higher rates are for fall and holiday periods). Larger, queen-bedded rooms usually average between $130 and $140, though they can go all the way up to $175 in September, October, and November. Two-room suites that can sleep up to four, with two in the bedroom and the other two on the foldout couch, range all the way from $150 a night to $355 during holiday times. Rooms with numbers ending in "03" have large windows and lovely views of the street, but no private facilities. These bathless doubles can range from $75 a night up to $105. (If you're going the "shared-bath route," ask to be housed on the third floor, which is where the facilities are; guests on other floors must use the stairs or elevators to get to the loo.)

$–$$$ From the outside, the **Gershwin Hotel** ★ (7 E. 27th St., between Madison and Fifth aves.; ☎ 212/545-8000; www.gershwinhotel.com; N, R to 28th St.) looks like an extension of the Museum of Sex next door, with huge Plexiglas and metal appendages thrusting upward in a most provocative manner from this 100-year-old Beaux Arts building. They are just the first trumpetings of a hotel infatuated with pop art; not only are many walls covered with silk screens and paintings, but many of the guests are artists and musicians (everyone who plays at Joe's Pub stays here), and there's even a resident artist program to help struggling would-be-Warhols. What the Carlton (see above) is to Dalí-esque experiential art, the Gershwin is to those who find beauty in a can of Campbell's Soup. The hotel has a number of different types of guest rooms, from dorm rooms ($33 for a stay in a 10-bedded room, $43 per person in a six-bedded, $45 per person in a four-bedded, and $53 per bed in a one-bunk-bedded room) to small, colorful doubles

with private facilities ($109–$169, depending on the season) to larger doubles and suites, with such niceties as fridges, microwaves, and rocking chairs ($139–$189 for the former, $209–$281 for the latter). In all the rooms with private facilities, the mattresses are firm, the walls thick, and the housekeeping top-notch. The dorm rooms are also clean, though reports have it that they can get a bit rowdy—a carryover from the raucous bar and roof-deck, which are party destinations not just for guests but for many New Yorkers as well.

GREENWICH VILLAGE

The legendary haunt of artists and writers, full of history, quaint town houses, and tree-lined streets, "the Village" is another of those New York neighborhoods I can heartily recommend, one that can guarantee your enjoyment of a New York stay. Very few New Yorkers can afford an apartment in Greenwich Village, so if you get a chance to stay here, jump at it. This is simply a lovely, lovely neighborhood of period homes, wonderful restaurants, and neighborly residents.

$–$$ Location, location, location. Those are the key elements that **The Larchmont Hotel** ★★ (27 W. 11th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves; ☎ 212/989-9333; www.larchmonthotel.com; A, E, C, B, D, F to W. 4th St.) offers in spades, as it's situated on one of the prettiest tree-lined streets in the Village, a block of historic brownstones just a short stroll from top dining, shopping, and the subway. What the Larchmont doesn't have (because the hotel is housed in a Beaux Arts-era brownstone without the plumbing or structure to support it) are private bathrooms and showers for the guest rooms. Instead, travelers share two toilets and two showers per floor (with either six or seven rooms per floor). Should this keep you from choosing this hotel for your stay? I hope not, because other than the fact that you have to pad down the hallway to use the facilities, this is a charming, extremely well-maintained hotel in which the owners have striven to keep the period feel throughout, filling the rooms with rattan furniture, bookshelves brimming with hardcover books, and good firm beds. There are also some very high-class amenities here, such as portable sacks of really nice soaps and shampoos, cotton robes and slippers, high-speed Internet access, and multi-channel cable TV. Room rates are $75 to $89 for admittedly small single rooms, $99 to $109 for double-bedded digs, and $119 for a lovely and spacious queen-bedded room with a view of the street. In winter, the hotel often offers a fourth-night free promotion; always check the website before booking, as it sometimes offers $10- to-$20-a-night discounts. Rates include a quality continental breakfast of croissants, muffins, tea, coffee, and juice.

$$–$$$ Another Village beauty, this time with private facilities, **Incentra Village House** ★★★ (32 Eighth Ave. near Jane St.; ☎ 212/206-0007; A, E, C to 14th St.) is actually three small former one-family homes that have been divided up into guest apartments. Each guest room has its own doorbell from the street, and all but two have working fireplaces and full kitchens (I know of no other hotel in New York with both of these amenities). Rates favor single travelers, with all of the rooms but two starting at just $119 per night for solos. When two vacationers inhabit that same room, the rate leaps to $169; triple occupancy is $199; and four people are charged $229. The larger rooms—one of which is a split-level

Downtown Accommodations

Cosmopolitan Hotel **12**
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suite, the other has the only access in the house to the willow-tree shaded garden out back—cost $149 (single), $199 (double), $229 (triple), and $259 (quad). I wish the prices didn't increase so sharply, but I have to say, these digs are worth it: All are large and sunny, filled with period furniture (brass beds in some, four-posters in others) and caring touches such as rocking chairs, cable TV, free WiFi, and a grand piano for the guests' use in the communal and very Victorian parlor. Two of the rooms are on the ground level, good for travelers with disabilities; the others require that you climb some steps (there's no elevator). You're also doing a lot of good by staying here: Founder Gaylord J. Hoftieser died of AIDS in 1994; his trust runs the place and donates the proceeds to AIDS research.

Note: The Incentra books up well in advance—many of its guests are relatives of people who live in Greenwich Village, which I think says a lot about the place—so make sure you call for reservations 4 to 6 weeks in advance, especially for a weekend or holiday stay.

A TINY SPLURGE

$$$–$$$$ My 2006 award for "most improved" New York hotel goes to the **Washington Square Hotel** ✰✰ (103 Waverly Place at MacDougal St.; ☎ 800/222-0418 or 212/777-9194; www.washingtonsquarehotel.com; Ⓐ, Ⓒ, Ⓔ, Ⓑ, Ⓓ, Ⓕ to W. 4th St.), which always had a top location, right off graceful Washington Square Park, but now has a decor to match, filled with Art Deco touches and paintings, murals, and photos that pay homage to the many stars who stayed in this historic hotel. Built in 1904, it served as a second home for many top vaudeville and Broadway performers until the '50s, when it devolved into a rather seedy apartment hotel housing a number of struggling artists, actors, and musicians including Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Barbara Streisand, Bill Cosby, and Phyllis Diller. Legend has it that the Mamas and the Papas wrote "California Dreamin" on a gray winter day at the Washington Square. In 1973 the hotel was purchased by the Paul family, whose matriarch, Rita Paul, created all of the hokey but fun celebrity ceramic murals in the lobby area, in addition to blowing up the large photos of Hollywood starlets of the '30s that grace the guest rooms. Nightly rates start at $149 (but can go up to $190) for an air-shaft-facing single; doubles average $195 to $225. The rooms, though small, are well-designed with cushy duvets, richly jeweled colored walls, and space-saving features (such as the wall-mounted TV) that make the rooms appear slightly bigger than they actually are.

NEW YORK'S "EAST VILLAGE" & LOWER EAST SIDE

Welcome now to Bohemia, where the median age on the street (if not in the apartments) is 27; where a new music club or lounge/restaurant seems to sprout each week; and where works of art constantly appear on street corners and lampposts. The hotels of this area are just as quirky; you won't find any Marriotts or Westins! With rare exceptions, the lodgings are small and possess an "attitude," lacking such amenities as room service and gyms; they make up for those missing features with odd, whimsical murals on staircases or owners who will talk with you for 20 minutes about a favorite nearby restaurant.

$–$$$ And that advice-giving hotelier, in case you were wondering, is Carlos Delfin, the dashing Peruvian émigré who owns **Second Home on Second Avenue** ★★ (221 Second Ave., between 13th and 14th sts.; ☎ 212/677-3161; http://secondhomesecondavenue.com; 4, 5, 6, N, R to Union Sq., or L to Third Ave.). He's the heart and soul of this place, and has taste that I envy (though I'm proud to say that he picked the same shower curtains I did for his bathrooms). Each room has a theme—either modern, Peruvian, Caribbean, or tribal—but these are subtly carried out and guest rooms are not only well-sized and comfortable but filled with bold and interesting pieces of art, many created by his father; a cable TV and phone; and well-made and unusual furniture (such as a bed with plumbing joints artfully incorporated into the frame). Sound too good to be true? Well, there are two catches. This really is a homelike place, meaning that just like so many of us do at home, you'll have to share a bathroom (this keeps prices low, though, at just $85 to $110 per night, depending on how many people are sharing the room; two suites, which go for $185 a night, can sleep up to six and do have private facilities). ***Note:*** As the guesthouse is part of a 19th-century home, it's a two-story-climb to get to the first floor of rooms, so this is not a good option for persons with limited mobility.

$–$$ Ann Erdris, ex-wife of East Village hotelier Carlos Delfin (see above), runs the area's second top bargain, **East Village Bed & Coffee** ★ (110 Ave. C, off 9th St.; ☎ 212/533-4175; www.bedandcoffee.com; no nearby subway stop), which was actually the former couple's first hotel and has many of the same touches as Delfin's more expensive Second Home (again, see above): It's a walk-up, guest rooms share a bathroom, and rooms are "themed," though the decor is even more whimsical here. Pick the "French Room," for example, and you'll be sleeping on Eiffel Tower sheets and surrounded by walls speckled with Impressionist prints. The "children's room" is all primary colors, with toys on high shelves as art; the "flying" room has model airplanes floating from the sky-blue and fluffy white-clouded ceiling, and maps covering the walls. Each of the two floors has four bedrooms, which share a bathroom, a kitchen (Anne stocks them with coffee, tea, and such necessities as condiments, oil, sugar, vinegar, and salt), and a small living room, which has a phone with an answering machine and a TV. There's also a small garden in back and four bikes that Anne lends to guests, free of charge. Rooms range from $85 to $110, depending on the size of the room and how many are sharing it (full details on the website). Like Carlos, Anne is an attentive, knowledgeable, and interesting hostess (you can see how they'd be a couple). Don't be put off by the graffiti on the front door: This safe, charming lodging has been in business since 1995 and has never had a theft or burglary in that time. The only downside to staying here, to my mind, is the lack of a nearby subway stop; still, the walk to transportation is an interesting one, past community gardens just bursting with wildflowers, and bustling, chic restaurants and bars.

$–$$ Typically odd but a fine value is the strangely named **Sohotel** ★ (341 Broome St. near Bowery; ☎ 800/73700702 or 212/226-1482; S to Grand St.), which isn't in Soho but on the border of Chinatown and the Lower East Side. One of the oldest hotels in the city (built in 1822), it housed Union soldiers during the Civil War. It has simple but extremely affordable and well-maintained digs

The Art of Room Haggling

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Never take a 'no' from someone who doesn't have the power to say 'yes.'" That should be your motto as you begin your search for an affordable bed, because talking to the head honcho will be key in snagging a discount. One of the best ways to approach these folks is to say very honestly: "I can afford to spend X number of dollars per night. Can you match that price?" If the hotel cannot, simply call another property; although space is tight in Manhattan, there are periods when there will be vacancies and you just may be able to talk someone down (it happens more often than you'd suppose).

Some key rules in bargaining:

1. **Use the local number, not the 800 number.** The reservationists who answer 800 numbers, particularly those of the larger hotel chains, do not have the authority to play with prices, so trying to bargain with them is a waste of time.
2. **Ask to speak to a manager or—if the hotel has one—the reservations manager.** Call back or have that person call you back if he or she is not available when you call. It's better to take a half-hour to speak to the person in charge than it is to accept a higher price from a subordinate.
3. **Do some research before you call,** by contacting New York's tourist board, **NYC & Company** (☎ 212/484-1200 or www.nycvisit.com) and finding out if there are any major conventions in town. When major conventions are expected, it's unlikely you'll be able to snag a discount, particularly in the Midtown hotels. The same can be said for dates that fall over the Christmas/New Year's period, the weekend of the New York Marathon (always in Sept), Fashion Week (Sept and Feb usually), or Thanksgiving.

in a four-story walk-up on a quiet side street. The rooms, which have a dormitory ambience, feature polished wood floors, cable TVs, tall bureaus, exposed brick walls, and beds so hard that they occasionally squeak when you lie on them. But the vast majority of them also have small private bathrooms with showers, and because they cost a mere $99 to $109 year-round for a double (the cheaper ones are very small), they have to be counted among the best deals in the city. Large rooms that can easily sleep seven, with two double beds and one single, are a reasonable $129; potential quads with two double beds are $119. For those on really tight budgets, there are also single rooms on the top floor with a sink but shared toilet and shower for just $69.

$$ In the very heart of the East Village, **Saint Marks Hotel** (2 St. Marks Place, right off Third Ave.; ☎ 212/674-0100; www.stmarkshotel.qpg.com; 6 to Astor

Place, or R, O to 9th St.) used to be a well-known "hot sheets" operation. It has since cleaned up its act and decor, offering motel-like double rooms with private bathroom with shower (no tub) for $110 a night year-round; rooms with two double beds that can sleep four go for $140. Though you will see scuff marks on some of the walls, and the beds can alternately be too hard or too soft (like the princess and the pea, you may have to try a few mattresses before finding one that suits your sensibilities), the rooms are tidy and most are not too tiny (again, look at a couple before you settle on a room). Ask for a room in the back, as St. Marks Place is the East Village's premier party place, with bars, tattoo parlors, street vendors, and T-shirt shops; it can get quite loud.

$–$$$ Dependable, well-priced digs can also be found at the **Off-Soho Hotel** (11 Rivington St. at Chrystie; ☎ 800/OFF-SOHO or 212/979-9808; www.offsoho.com; F to Second Ave., or J, Z, M to Essex St.), which is in one of the most rapidly gentrifying areas of the Lower East Side, a neighborhood where wine bars and trendy boutiques share sidewalk space with Hasidic haberdashers and the decades-old fashion discounters of Orchard Street. The Off-SoHo has two types of lodgings: private suites, which boast a full kitchen (with actual ovens, round dining table, and full-size fridge), foldout couch, bedroom, and large bathroom; or good-sized bedrooms with two twin beds that share a bathroom and a kitchen with one other room. Can you guess which is cheaper? Ding, ding: It's the one that shares the bathroom, which costs between $99 and $119 (in spring, summer, and deep winter) and $109 to $129 (Sept 1–Dec 31). The private suites, which could easily hold four friends or family members, range from $179 to $229, depending on the season; I think there are better values elsewhere for the latter type of lodging, as the furniture is quite "well-used" and the rooms, while clean, can be a bit dreary looking. On the plus side, there's a decent gym on-site and a laundry room for guests.

$–$$$ The most standard lodgings in the 'hood can be found at the **Howard Johnson Express Inn** (135 E. Houston St., on the corner of Chrystie St.; ☎ 800/446-4656 or 212/358-8844; www.hojo.com; F, V to Second Ave.). It's nothing to write home about—with that beige-on-beige-on-beige Hojo look—but the location is good, straddling the border between the East Village and the Lower East Side; the rooms are roomy (as are the private bathrooms); a basic continental breakfast is included, and it's cleaned thoroughly each day. Single rooms tend to average between $129 and $139, but can drop to $99 during very slow periods. Expect to pay about $20 more for doubles.

TRIBECA & THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT

TriBeCa and Wall Street, in Lower Manhattan, are two areas in the city where rates drop rather than rise over the weekends, as the hotels in these quarters tend to host businesspeople almost exclusively. While the Financial District empties out at night and on weekends, giving it a barren aspect at those times, TriBeCa is more of a residential neighborhood and quite an appealing area for visitors, with dramatic cast-iron buildings, top restaurants, and many posh stores (fun for window-shopping even if you can't afford to buy).

$$ George Washington never slept here, but the staff at **Hotel Cosmopolitan** ★★ (95 W. Broadway, at the corner of Chambers St.; ☎ 888/895-9400 or 212/566-1900; www.cosmohotel.com; 1 to Chambers St.) swear that Abraham Lincoln did, back when the building was Hotel Girard. Built in the 1840s, it's always been a hotel of some sort or another, and the Lilliputian dimensions of some of the cheaper rooms reflect both how much smaller people were back then, and the extraordinary premium there is on space today. Despite the cramped quarters, the Cosmopolitan is a terrific value, on the northern edge of exclusive TriBeCa on a corner that's lively during the day but fairly quiet at night (important, as all rooms face one of two major thoroughfares). A crack housekeeping staff keeps the place terrifically tidy; no frayed carpets, no telltale signs of the last guest; you won't even see scuff marks on the walls. Beds are firm and rooms are decorated in dignified tans and blacks with nice photos and old prints of New York City scenes on the walls. The cheapest choices, at $119 a night, are odd "duplexes," minuscule rooms that place the beds up near the ceiling in a loft to better utilize the space (if you have limited mobility, you may want to avoid these, as you do have to ascend a staircase to get into bed). For $10 more, you can sleep on the same level as the cable TV set. There are also mini-suites (really two tiny rooms) with double bed and pullout sofa bed ($135), plus fairly good-sized rooms with two double beds ($159) and even larger suites with two queen beds and a sofa ($169) that are perfect for families. All rooms come with full bathroom, dataport, air-conditioning, and ceiling fan. No breakfast is included, but there's a Starbucks right off the lobby and a French pastry shop just down the block.

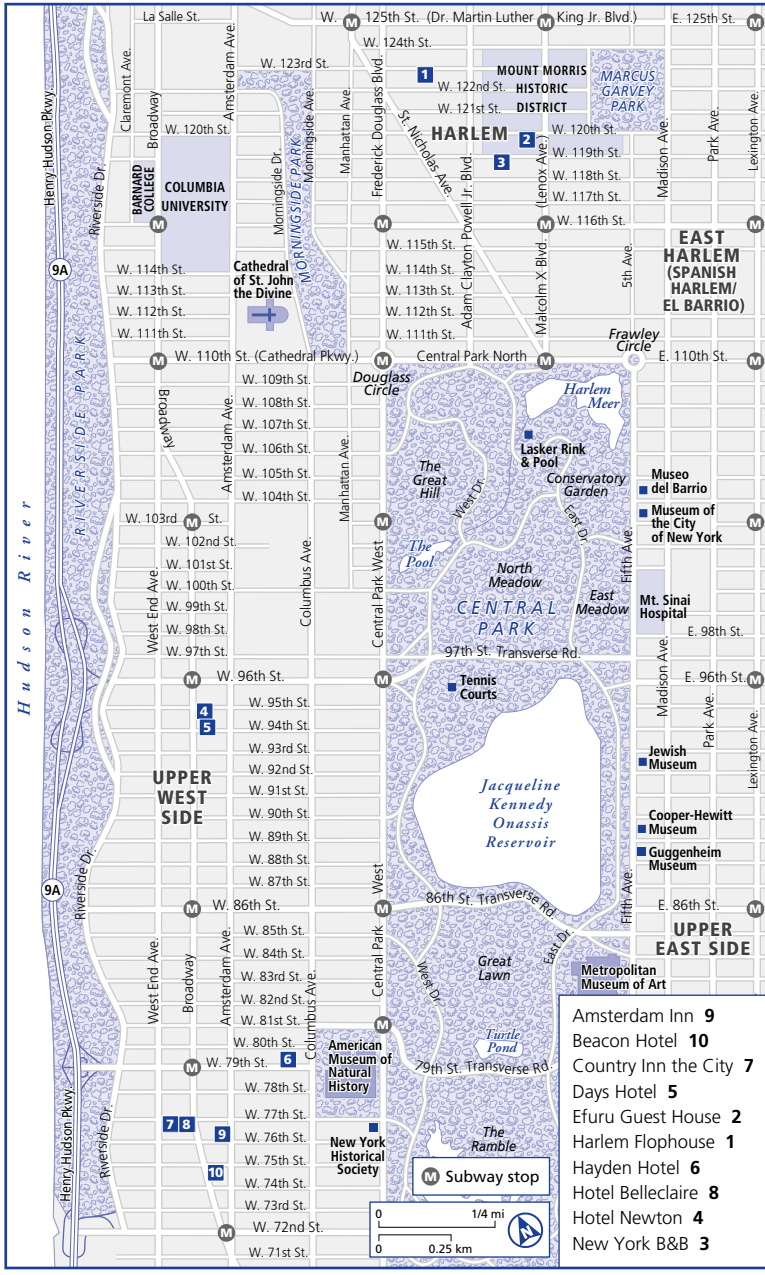
$$$$ On a historic block in the Financial District, but not actually on Wall Street, **The Wall Street Inn** ★ (9 S. William St., at the corner of Mill St.; ☎ 877/747-1500 or 212/747-1500; www.thewallstreetinn.com; 4, 5 to Bowling Green, or R, O to Whitehall St.) is a sensible splurge choice in Lower Manhattan. The friendly, cheerful, family-owned property pays homage to its historic neighborhood with Ethan Allen–type reproductions of historic Colonial furnishings in the guest rooms and lobby. All the soothing celadon-green rooms come with good-size bathrooms; TVs and VCRs; two-line telephones with dataports; good, springy-but-not-soft beds; fresh flowers; and enough elbow room to make it seem reasonable that you're spending about $220 a night for a weekend stay, and sometimes $100 more than that for a weekday, high-season stay. Rates include a filling continental breakfast and use of the on-site gym.

SEINFELD TERRITORY: THE UPPER WEST SIDE

Family oriented, near Central Park, and highly residential, this is another top area for visitors. The Upper West Side is well served by seven subway lines (1, 2, 3, A, C, B, D), making it a snap to get from here to any other area of the city (though you'll have to take a crosstown bus to get to the Upper East Side).

$–$$ Amsterdam Inn ★★ (340 Amsterdam Ave. at 76th St.; ☎ 212/579-7500; www.nyinns.com; 1, 2, 3 to 72nd St.) is the third of the NY Hotel Group's properties, and its spotless, natty rooms are the equivalent of what you'd find at its sister property, the Murray Hill Inn (and make its doppelganger, the Union Square Inn, seem even more of an anomaly). Most of the rooms feature brand-new and

Upper West Side & Harlem Accommodations



smooth-to-the-touch polished wood floors, neo-Shaker furniture so nice you'd want it in your own home, and newly tiled bathrooms. Deluxe queen-bedded rooms, which contain microwave and fridge, range from $129 to $149 a night year-round; without the cooking corner, these rooms go for $109 to $129. There are also two smaller, less stylish rooms (blood-red rugs, older furniture) with small double beds that go for between $109 and $129 most of the year; and similarly furnished rooms with shared bathrooms at $89 to $99. As with the other inns in this group, the rate includes free WiFi and a coupon for breakfast, this time at a neighborhood favorite, the Bagel Café. Interestingly enough, the Amsterdam Inn has worked out a $10-a-day workout deal with the plush Equinox gym nearby; at the fancier hotels in the 'hood, the daily Equinox charge is $25.

$–$$$ Somehow, in its changeover from a Quality Inn to the **Days Hotel Broadway** (215 W. 94th St., right off Broadway; ☎ 800/DAYS-INN or 212/866-6400; www.daysinn.com; 1, 2, 3 to 96th St.), this solid Upper West Side lodging got Edwardian pretensions, filling its lobby with fake leather books, crystal candelabras, and nailed-down, faux Grecian busts. You see a tiny hint of this new mindset in the guest rooms as well, with their brightly patterned bedspreads and elegantly shaded (though still nailed-down) lamps. But the biggest change here is that there's *been* a change, and mattresses, linens, carpets, and other accoutrements have been replaced with high-quality materials, all brand, spanking-new. When Days Inn took over the property, the conversion was a fairly simple one, as the giant chain had good "bones" to work with: All of the rooms were already slightly larger than the norm, with decent-sized closets and full bathrooms with showers. They also inherited a top-notch staff of genuinely caring desk clerks, maids, and bellhops. Guest rooms can vary wildly in price, sometimes starting as low as $99 even during peak season. On weekends during holiday times, the rate for a standard room can peak at $249, but in general you won't pay more than $149 for a night here. The key is to hit the hotel when it doesn't have a massive group of Europeans in residence (it works with the tour company "Explore America" to fill many of its rooms)—inquire when you book. Discounts are often listed on the Days Inn website, so check there before you make a reservation.

$–$$$ Just around the corner, directly on Broadway, is **Hotel Newton** (2528 Broadway; ☎ 800/643-5553 or 212/678-6500; www.newyorkhotel.com; 1, 2, 3 to 96th St.), which I would rank slightly lower than the Days Hotel Broadway in both ambience and service. While the staff is professional, it lacks the genuine warmth that you feel at the "Days." As for the guest rooms, they're equivalent to what you'd find around the corner: immaculate and decorated in what I'd call "Nouveau Motel"—if you plug your ears so that you can't hear any of the Manhattan traffic noises (a problem in the rooms that face Broadway), you could be in a standard, off-the-interstate motel in any state in the nation. That being said, they're also as large as those interstate motel rooms tend to be, with solid, quality mattresses. Single rooms here can drop as low as $85 a night (an excellent value for lodgings with private facilities), but you're more likely to pay between $95 and $120 for a single, depending on the season, with rates peaking at $150 during holiday periods. Double rooms start at $95 per night during the depths of winter, but once again, you're much more likely to pay a bit more: between $120 and $160 a night.

Victorian Charm on the Upper West Side

In 1992, Fergus O'Brien and Larry Turk, life partners, were in jeopardy of losing the historic 1891 five-story building they had bought together (it was an early project of the architect who did the Empire State Building), thanks to tenants who were less than reliable with their rents. Needing another strategy to keep the house, they decided to convert the apartments into an inn, and they set about trolling antiques fairs and shops, slowly filling each room with treasures and furnishings that evoked the home's Victorian origins. They opened their first room in the mid-'90s, and slowly added three more, in the process garnering reviews and creating the type of loyal clientele that larger hotels only dream of.

Today, **Country Inn the City** ★★★ (270 W. 77th St., off Broadway; ☎ 212/580-4183; www.countryinnthecity.com; 1 to 79th St.; **$$–$$$$**) operates at a near 100% capacity and favors guests looking to stay a week or more. Each sizable apartment comes with its own fully stocked little kitchen (cereal, coffee, and tea are included, along with pots, pans, wine glasses, and all the flatware and cutlery you would need) and a winsome decor of four-poster or sleigh beds, William Morris–like wallpapers, comfy period armchairs, and even a trellised balcony (off the top-floor apartment). Scattered here and there are such fanciful touches as a basket of ostrich eggs, a set of antlers affixed to the wall, or a mantelpiece with a tray of Limoges teaware for decoration (because these objects are highly breakable, the Inn does not accept children under 13).

Each apartment costs between $150 and $250 a night, depending on the season (summer and deep winter are cheapest), and to snag one you'll likely have to book a month and a half in advance, at which point you'll be required to put down a 25% deposit. Room rates include free WiFi and local phone calls. ***Note:*** Because this is an older building, there is no on-site elevator, requiring guests to ascend one, two, or three flights of stairs to get to their rooms.

$–$$$$ Budget-conscious travelers who enjoy a dash of style with their savings can't do better than **Hotel Belleclaire** ★★ kids (250 W. 77th St., on the corner of Broadway; ☎ 877/HOTELBC or 212/362-7700; www.hotelbelleclaire.com; 1, 2, 3 to 72nd St.) in this area, though for truly budget digs, they'll have to accept a room without private facilities ($99–$129). Still, these are among the loveliest rooms I've seen anywhere, averaging a generous 350 square feet and painted a buttercup yellow, with excellent quality mattresses, fluffy duvets, chic ultra-suede backboards on the beds, CD players, cable TV with Nintendo, tidy little sinks, bureaus, and useable closets. There are three of these rooms per floor and they're set off in their own little section, sharing one bathroom, with another door closing them off from the hallway (and thus making them perfect for large families

or groups of five or six). The rate for rooms with private bathrooms increases sharply to $189 to $199 for a queen-bedded room (though these will sometimes drop to $129 in Jan and Feb), about $10 more for rooms with two double beds, and up to $299 for two-room suites, Ask for a room in the back of the hotel and on a higher floor for great views of the Hudson River. The hotel also has a well-equipped gym and 24-hour room service.

$–$$$$ You're paying for the location at **Park 79 Hotel** (117 W. 79th St. between Amsterdam and Columbus; ☎ 800/293-3141 or 212/787-4900; www.park79hotel.com; 1 to 79th St., or C, B to 77th St.), a former S.R.O. (aka welfare hotel) within a dinosaur's stride of the Museum of Natural History. Rooms are generally small, dark, and forgettably furnished, with stiff beds and tiny bathrooms. Still, they're dirt-free, with satellite TV and such niceties as telephones with voice mail and clock radios. On the top floor, the rooms share showers and toilets and go for between $65 and $99 a night for singles, $75 and a too-high $139 a night for doubles. Standard doubles with private bathrooms can sometimes drop as low as $99 but usually cost between $139 and $159, sometimes bounding all the way up to $189 (at which point you should look elsewhere). Larger rooms, classified as deluxe, start at $109 but can go as high as $209 in the peak seasons (again, not worth it if you're quoted a high-season rate).

A MID-RANGE OPTION

$$$–$$$$ What I can tell you about **The Beacon Hotel** (2130 Broadway at 75th St.; ☎ 800/572-4969 or 212/787-1100; www.beaconhotel.com; 1, 2, 3 to 72nd St.) is that its rooms are big, each with a double closet; full bathroom; double-paned windows (to muffle street noises); and kitchenette with two burners, a microwave, and a fridge. Its location is top-notch, equidistant from Central Park and Riverside Park, and just 2 blocks from the 72nd Street subway stop, which gets express as well as local trains. Its rates tend to be reasonable, once you learn to ignore the rack rates (which seem to be posted only as a weird form of decoration), and go on the Internet for standard rooms that will average $155 in January and February, $185 in peak season, and $175 the rest of the year (expect to pay between $10 and $40 more for a one-bedroom suite that can house four or five guests; $5 extra for use of the huge next-door gym). But what I can't tell you is what the rooms will look like once this book is published, as the hotel is on the brink of an "extreme makeover," with new decor planned for the now-traditional-looking lobby and guest rooms. I recommend it nonetheless, because the sizes of and amenities in the rooms won't change, nor (they've promised) will the prices.

UPPER EAST SIDE

You'll pay more to stay in this area of town, and if your hotel's near the park, you'll shell out more not only for your room, but at local diners, drugstores, and grocery stores. Still, the Upper East Side has its allure, with its trim, effortlessly chic Madison Avenue moms; its soldierlike doormen along Park Avenue, each charged with guarding the homes of the wealthiest families in the U.S.; its elegant boutiques (again on Madison); and, of course, its museums, which are the finest in this hemisphere. Because affordable lodgings are so few and far between here, and

the luxe hotels are outrageously overpriced, I've found only two spots that I can recommend in good conscience.

$$–$$$$ Choice number one is actually on the line between Midtown and the Upper East Side, and so far east that you can count the tugboats chugging up the East River from your hotel window. It's that locale, with its great views but poor accessibility to subways and even to restaurants and shops (you have to walk one very looong avenue block west to hit those, and two avenues to get to the good ones) that keep prices reasonable at the **Bentley Hotel** ★★ (500 E. 62nd St., off York Ave.; 212/644-6000; www.nychotels.com; 6, N, R, to 59th St.), which in any other location would be the most exclusive of properties. It boasts a cutting-edge, modern look—all strawlike wallpaper, heaping down comforters, and such mod touches as CD players and small rocks affixed to the walls out of which realistic-looking paper flowers sprout. The rooms are spacious, as are the marble private bathrooms, and start at just $135 a night, in low season, though you're much more likely to pay about $189 a night here, for quarters with queen-size beds (king-bedded rooms cost about $20 more, suites even more than that). The hotel has a sexy lounge on its top floor with mesmerizing views looking down onto the Midtown Bridge.

$$$$ Choice number two is **Gracie Inn** ★ (502 E. 81st St. just off York Ave.; ☎ 800/101-2252 or 212/628-1700; www.gracieinn.com; 6 to 79th St.), again on the eastern reaches of the city, this time near the mayor's official residence (Gracie Mansion), and accessible to a number of affordable and cute if undistinguished eateries. The Gracie has the look of a New England country inn, all lace curtains and flowered wallpapers, and a staff of handsome 20-something guys in baseball caps and T-shirts straight out of MTV's *Real World*. It's a bit of a splurge, but some factors keep the costs here within the budget ballpark. First off, each room comes equipped with a fully serviceable kitchen, though if you don't feel like cooking, a deluxe continental breakfast of fruits, muffins, pastries, and croissants is provided. And in a very guest-friendly move, the hotel charges by the room, not by the number of guests, so a one-bedroom unit, which actually holds two beds (one queen and one double) costs no more for four people than it does for two, and could comfortably hold the four, with closets and flatscreen TVs in each room (though everyone has to share a bathroom). Other room amenities include free WiFi and a CD player. Those one-bedroom units start at $199 in low season, but usually go for $235; studios range from $169 to $199. It's a good enough value for you to want to "Say goodnight, Gracie."

HARLEM

No neighborhood in New York has made such a complete turnaround in the last 3 decades as Harlem. Where there once were abandoned buildings, there are now million-dollar brownstones; where crack dealers and their customers once haggled, there are Starbucks and Mac cosmetic stores; and where gangs once terrorized the populace, Bill Clinton looks down benignly from his top-floor office on 125th Street. Yes, there still are certain areas of Harlem that can be a bit dodgy (particularly East Harlem), but for the most part this friendly, historic area—especially the section where the hotels below are located—is as safe and as welcoming of visitors as any other area of Manhattan.

$ The oldest guesthouse in Harlem, **New York B&B** (134, 140, and 239 W. 119th St., near Malcolm X Blvd.; ☎ 212/666-0559; ❷, ❸ to 116th St.) is also the cheapest. Chatty, helpful owner Giselle Allard has a mini-empire going with five separate brownstones catering to travelers on extremely low budgets (private rooms sans bathrooms cost $70 double, $55 single; dorm accommodations run $25 to $30 a night; there are also mini-apartments on Manhattan Ave. for long-term guests at varying prices). Each house has a fully equipped kitchen for guests to use; they also have access to the laundry facilities at the Malcolm X Boulevard building. That being said, these guesthouses are showing their age. The buildings, all turn-of-the-20th-century family homes, have lovely period details—molding, elaborate stair rails, high ceilings and windows—but are about 5 years overdue for a paint job, and each room is filled with a chaotic assortment of thrift-store furniture, the bunk beds a tad shakier than they should be. I will give Ms. Allard credit for investing in the most important object in any hotel: the mattresses. These are all good quality, ensuring that those who do stay here will get a solid night's sleep. Her next outlay needs to be for air-conditioners: currently they can only be found on the top floors (so ask for one of those rooms if you plan to visit in summer). ***One final note:*** Though the name implies that breakfast is included, none is served anymore.

$–$$ For a classier introduction to the neighborhood, choose **Harlem Flophouse** ★★ (242 W. 123rd St., between Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell boulevards; ☎ 212/662-0678; www.harlemflophouse.com; ❷, ❸ to 125th St.), an 1870s row house that was a famous flophouse in the 1920s, patronized by numerous top musicians and artists of that era. With that history in mind, owner Renee Calvo has restored the house to what it might have looked like before the stock market crashed, dotting the rooms with found objects such as antique radios, lamps shaped like penguins, and Victorian furnishings and wallpapers, which are often artfully ripped in spots so that visitors can see the old wallpaper or wooden details below. The four rooms are tremendously comfy, oversized, and airy, with large, lace-curtained windows, bureaus, desks, flatscreen cable TVs, free WiFi, and sinks. Each pair shares an artistically tiled bathroom (one with skylight) as well as a verdant, overgrown garden out back where Renee often invites guests in summer to an impromptu barbecue (in winter, it's not unusual for him to host guests in his basement apartment for dinner). There's a precinct at the end of the block, to assuage the fears of visitors who still might be wary of lodging this far uptown. The only negative to staying here, that I can detect, is the lack of air-conditioning; other than that, this is a terrific year-round deal at $100 a night for single travelers, and $125 for couples. Preference is given to guests staying a week or more, though it is possible to book 3- or 4-night stays as well.

$–$$ Though not nearly as charming, **Efuru Guesthouse** ★ (106 W. 120th St. between Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell boulevards; ☎ 212/961-9855; www.efuruguesthouse.com; ❷, ❸ to 125th St.) makes up for its somewhat generic though brightly colored medium-size rooms with its excellent pricing: A double room with private bathroom and kitchenette goes for just $125 a night; those that share a bathroom are a reasonable $95 a night (and those prices often drop 10% mid-Jan to Mar). There are other nice extras here as well, including a

lovely private garden off one of the guest rooms; use of the large, fully equipped kitchen off the living room; a private entrance at the ground-floor level for guests (everyone gets his or her own set of keys), high-grade beds, cable TV, direct-dial phones, and free WiFi. Because there are only five guest rooms, the Efuru books up quickly; call at least 2 months ahead, 6 months for holiday periods.

HOSTELS & LOW-COST SPECIALTY HOTELS

SPECIALTY HOTELS

A number of New York hotels simply aren't for everyone—either because they require a certain mindset or because they are clubs, meant only to admit certain types of individuals. Because these lodgings have raison d'êtres that have absolutely nothing to do with making money, they can be wonderfully affordable and interesting places to stay.

$ This is particularly true of the **Soldiers', Sailors', Marines' & Airmens' Club** ★ (283 Lexington Ave., between 36th and 37th sts.; ☎ 800/678-8443 or 212/683-4353; www.ssmaclub.org; 6 to 33rd St.), which has a much broader admission policy than you would expect. Not only does it admit veterans and active military (including soldiers and sailors from Allied nations), beginning in 2004 it opened its doors to America's so-called "first responders": firefighters, police officers, and EMS workers. The prices are laughably low; in fact, Executive Director Peter J. Le Beau told me with a resigned smile, "Our costs are always escalating, but we don't raise the prices, so the more people we accommodate, the more we lose." (As you might imagine, much of his time is spent fund-raising. If you'd like to donate to this noble enterprise, go to the website for information.) Enlisted troops in categories E1 to E4 and cadets pay just $25 a night; enlisted men and women E5 and above pay $37 a night; officers and retired military (including widows and widowers) pay between $47 and $52, depending on rank, with children between the ages of 3 and 14 paying $10 per night. For these sums, each person gets one bed, usually in narrow two-, three-, or four-bedded rooms (couples and families obviously are housed together) that are simple but pleasant, with framed prints on the walls, pretty curtains, and reasonably comfortable twin-size beds. The only real military touch in the rooms is the use of lockers rather than closets for personal belongings. Rooms do not have private facilities; instead, the men share one bathroom per floor, the women the other. Also shared are the flag-laden lounges (which look like they could have been lifted from the private quarters of the White House), where guests hang out to watch TV or use the Internet.

$$ Even more inclusive, **The Seafarers and International House** ★★ (123 E. 15th St., off Irving Place; ☎ 212/677-4800; www.sihnyc.org ; 4, 5, 6, N, R, L to Union Sq.) has admitted members of the general public since the 1970s. Today about 40% of its guests are merchant marines and other sailors, while 60% of the guests are . . . well, anyone and everyone. There seem to be no real requirements for admission to this Lutheran mission, though you do have to plan ahead, as rooms can sell out up to a year in advance. Why is it so popular? Though the rooms are plainly furnished, they have more of those all-important little touches than you'll find at most budget properties: The linens on the beds are soft; there are extra rolls of toilet paper in the bathrooms; the furniture looks brand new and

matches; and each room has a remote control, not only for the TV but also for the air-conditioning—telling, small details that say much about the quality of the upkeep and service here. These extras are all the more remarkable considering that double rooms with private bathrooms go for just $126 and singles with private bathrooms are just $106. Also offered are shared bathroom singles ($76) and doubles ($96). Though the building is run by the Lutherans and there is a weekly service on premises, there's no real spiritual component to a stay here.

RELIGIOUS RETREATS

For a religious setting, you'll need turn to one of the numerous retreat houses and church-run guesthouses in New York that offer affordable and dignified accommodations, sometimes only for members of one faith, in other cases for almost anyone who requests shelter.

$–$$ One of the foremost such retreats is **The House of the Redeemer** ★★★ (7 E. 95th St. off Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/289-0339; www.houseoftheredeemer.org; 6 to 96th St.), which was deeded by Edith Shepard Fabbri—a great-granddaughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt—to a board of trustees to create "a place apart" for spiritual contemplation by people of all faiths. This was Fabbri's own house, a palatial Italian-Renaissance mansion with grand stone staircases, coffered ceilings, and entire rooms brought over intact from Italy (the library is one of the great treasures of the city, built in the 1400s for the Ducal Palace of Urbino and shipped through submarine-infested waters to the U.S. during World War I). Guests needing doubles stay in one of the family's five rooms, surrounded by the exquisite artwork and furniture left in the house by the Fabbris. These rooms go for either $100 (with shared bathroom) or $125 (with private facilities). The other eight single rooms ($75 each) are on the servant floors—there were three times as many servants as there were family members—and are simpler and without private bathrooms, but are still quite lovely with lace curtains in the windows, wooden furnishings, and comfortable new beds. In each room are crosses and other pieces of religious art—a purposeful touch, as spirituality plays a key role here: There are morning and afternoon prayer services in the chapel, weekly Bible study sessions and evening meditation classes and, though not mandatory, the retreats for which most guests come here specifically, sometimes in groups that book the entire house (so call well in advance if you're interested in staying here).

$–$$ Although not nearly as posh, **The Leo House** (332 W. 23rd St., between Eighth and Ninth aves.; ☎ 800/732-2438 or 212/929-1010; E, C to 23rd St.) is a decent second choice, operated by the Catholic Church, but with less of an overtly spiritual mission (though a non-mandatory Mass is celebrated daily in the small on-site chapel). The house was founded in 1889 by German Catholics to help their countrymen (and co-religionists) find their footing upon arrival in the "New World." Today it accepts travelers of all nationalities and religions—Baptist, Jewish, Animist, you name it—though there are limits to tolerance here. Administered by nuns, the rooms can only be shared by guests with their spouses or children (no "living in sin" or bringing back someone you met in a bar). In a particularly ironic, if not surprising policy, gay couples are not welcome to this, the only retreat center in New York's most flamboyantly gay neighborhood, Chelsea.

What does the place look like? Well, to be honest, it looks like it was decorated by nuns, both homey and homely at the same time, with rather hard beds and crosses on every other wall. Still, this 64-room facility is quite affordable, with singles that have toilet and sink but no private shower going for $75 a night, and the same types of doubles for $80. The vast majority of rooms have private facilities, and go for $85 (single), $90 (double), and $140 (family rooms holding four to six single beds). (Rooms numbered 10, 12, or 14 face the back and are quietest.) Rates don't include breakfast, though a full all-you-can-eat breakfast of eggs, oatmeal, fruit, and the like sells for just $6 in the pleasant, on-site cafeteria, or you can buy pastries and breads the sisters bake a la carte. While you eat breakfast, the video *Sights of New York* plays on a large-screen TV in the airy breakfast room, providing you with secular inspiration for your day of sightseeing in the city.

HOSTEL OPTIONS

The Upper West Side is the best area in the city for hostels, with a choice of three clean, well-maintained facilities, each renting well-priced private rooms in addition to dorms. The only downside to staying in this particular segment of town? The somewhat dreary location, which is generally safe, but less "neighborhoody" than other areas. It's also remote from Midtown, though if you walk to 96th and Broadway, the express train can get you to Times Square in 10 minutes flat.

$ Hosteling International New York (891 Amsterdam Ave., at the corner of 103rd St.; ☎ 212/932-2300; www.hinewyork.org; 1 to 103rd St., or 1, 2, 3 to 96th St.) is a mammoth, bustling operation—the largest hostel in the United States and third largest in the world, with a staggering 624 beds. It's more like a little city than a lodging, albeit a city in which most of the citizens are under 30 and speak 40 different languages. Along with guest rooms it offers an abundance of extras, including a tour desk, a gift shop, a cafe, two game rooms (one with video games, the other with pool tables), a highly useable shared kitchen, laundry facilities, two peaceful outdoor lounging areas, and a large TV lounge and volleyball court (where there are weekly tournaments in summer). For those planning to spend only their sleeping hours here, there are perks as well in the forms of large free lockers in each room, and immoveable, unshakeable, mightily solid bunks with decent mattresses that go for $30 a night in a 10- or 12-bedded room, $32 in an eight-bedder, and $35 if you're only sharing with four. Some dorm rooms are co-ed, others are divided by gender. There are also "family" rooms that are monastery-like in their utter lack of any decoration whatsoever (there's not even a print on the wall) but are really large and clean as a whistle, with a queen-size bed and a bunk bed for $120 a night (with shared bathroom); $135 with private toilet, sink, and shower.

$ Jazz on the Park (W. 106th St. between Manhattan Ave. and Central Park West; ☎ 212/932-1600; www.jazzonthepark.com; B, C to 103rd St.) is the hipster's hostel, with house music blaring in the art-filled lobby, weekly barbecues in summer ($5), photos of great jazz musicians in the hallways, and a color scheme in the rooms that is taken straight out of the *Wizard of Oz* (emerald greens, poppy reds, iridescent blues). Dorm rooms come with two, three, four, five, or six bunk beds, and the numbers on the beds aren't as prominent as they should be (which can lead to some awkward situations come bedtime); nor are they segregated by

gender, so if that makes you nervous, choose H.I. instead (see above). Another problem here are the mattresses, which are so thin in many cases that you can feel every ridge and spring; they do vary by bed, so test-drive a couple when you check in. Those reserving private rooms (with shared bathroom only) go 1 block uptown to the hostel's second building, again a mural-laden, vibrantly colorful place that is generally clean. Some rooms could use an overhaul; if you get stuck with one of those, request a move. The cheapest dorm beds are the 10- or 12-bedders for $27 a night, six- to eight-bedded rooms for $29, four-bedded rooms for $32. If you're traveling with a friend, it might make the most sense to share a private room at $75 a night for two twin beds (without private facilities). Rates cover a bagel and a cup of tea or coffee in the morning.

Note: Jazz on the Park has a second and more cramped hostel in the East Village called **Jazz on the Town** (307 E. 14th St. at Second Ave.; ☎ 212/228-2780; L to Third Ave.; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, L to Union Sq.), which is a decent choice for those who prefer staying downtown. Prices and amenities are the same, though there are no private rooms.

$ The third choice in the neighborhood is the **Central Park Hostel** (19 W. 103rd St., off Central Park West; ☎ 212/678-0491; B, C to 103rd St.), which falls squarely between the first two in terms of upkeep (better than Jazz on the Park, not as good as H.I.) and cool ambience (where it's one up on H.I. thanks to brightly colored walls and a funky lounge area, but well below Jazz's non-stop party). In rooms that house 10, beds go for $26 a night; there are also eight-bedders ($28); six-bedded digs ($30); and four-bedded units ($35). But the best value here may well be the private rooms, which have been newly renovated and feature good quality beds (actually, the mattresses are good throughout), cable TVs, microwaves, and private bathrooms; they start at only $75 per night.

A Times Square hostel

$ The **Big Apple Hostel** (119 W. 45th St., between Broadway and Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/302-2603; www.bigapplehostel.com; N, Q, R, S, 1, 2, 3 to Times Sq.), a backpacker magnet right in the heart of the Theater District is the best you'll do at this price in the Times Square area, but there are better-maintained hostels on the Upper West Side. The entire place needs a paint job and a thorough carpet cleaning, though the beds are fairly new and comfortable. The facility also offers guests a number of nice extras, including an on-site laundry; a fully-useable kitchen; free WiFi in the lobby (and locked cabinets where you can store your laptop and other valuables); an outdoor deck; and an indoor lounge with Playstation 2 (at a charge), a TV, and two computers. Rooms are all mixed gender, but only hold two bunk beds apiece (so there's less chance of getting a snorer); one bed costs $35 except in August and September, when the price oddly drops to $30. There are also double rooms for $92, each with its own sink but no shower or toilet; a rack for clothes; and a desk and chairs—the rooms are clean and midsize, if a bit bedraggled (you can find better shared-bathroom accommodations elsewhere).

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Average price per night for one double room: $ = Up to $100; $$ = $101 to $150; $$$ = $151 to $200; $$$$ = $201 and up

4 Dining Choices

For all tastes and pocketbooks

ITS COMPETITORS ARE HONG KONG AND PARIS, BRUSSELS AND SAN Francisco, Rome and New Orleans. But I'll argue hard that none of these other great restaurant cities has quite the same number of serious, satisfying eateries as New York, nor its amazing variety of cuisines in every price range . . . and quirk. Would you believe restaurants that serve only grilled cheese sandwiches or peanut butter concoctions—and flourish doing so?

How did the surprising volume and variety of New York restaurants come about?

- New York has a larger and more varied immigrant population than any of the other foremost restaurant cities—and that means ethnic specialties of every sort;
- New York has an unprecedented number of top-notch cooking schools, the offices of international magazines devoted to the art of cooking, and the headquarters of the Food Channel;
- The pace of life here is undoubtedly more hectic and pressured than in other famous restaurant cities, creating a vast population with "no time to cook."

Mix all these reasons together, sauté them over the bright flame of the city's celebrity, and you have a mecca for foodies, a place where people obsess over the gratification of their taste buds without anyone thinking it odd. In China, one way of saying "hello" is to ask, "Have you eaten?" In Gotham, we say, "Where have you eaten—and do you need a reservation?"

VALUE FOR MONEY SPENT: And it isn't only the costly places that produce expert, inventive cooking. For every renowned New York chef (think Daniel Boulud, Jean George Vorgerichten), there's a young sous-chef furiously chopping shallots while lining up investors to help him open his own little restaurant. And it's at these tiny start-ups—which have been sprouting like morels all over the East Village and Lower East Side of Manhattan—that you get gourmet fare (sometimes "borrowed" from the recipes of former bosses) at a third to a half less than the price of the snooty, old-guard establishments.

The bargains are even greater at the ethnic restaurants, which are the most vivid outlet for the incredible diversity of cultures and nationalities that make up this city. For nearly a century and a half, New York has been the staging point for gustatory invasions, if you will, of new foods, new techniques of cooking, and new recipes.

Between 1899 and 1910, a vast influx of Italian immigrants brought the first platters of spaghetti to the city (and thus created a staple of the American cuisine ever since). In 1910, Eastern European Jews began arriving in droves with the food most associated with New York City: the humble but proud bagel. (Though, to be fair, a chewier, sweeter version arrived in Montreal at about the same time.)

The Greek Civil War in the late 1940s brought waves of Greeks to the city, and they established the first diners, where typical American dishes would eventually be offered side by side with souvlaki, gyros, and spanakopita.

Then, as now, the "ethnics" offered locals a chance to try new foods at prices lower than the conventional American restaurants charged. Today hundreds and hundreds of ethnic restaurants are found in all parts of Manhattan. I know one 5-block area in Midtown where there's a taste-boggling choice of Malaysian food, Greek food, "Mao's home cooking" (from the Hunan province in China), Peruvian tamales, German sausages, pizza, Thai food, and that Esperanto of cuisine, "fusion." Each restaurant was founded and is currently staffed by immigrants from the country represented (with the exception of the fusion places, because, well . . . where would those people come from?). Best of all, patrons get complete meals, and good ones at that, for less than $15.

> *"Small, inexpensive restaurants are the home fires of New York City."*
>
> —Maeve Brennan, *The Long Winded Lady: Notes from the New Yorker*

That said, not all areas of the city are equal when it comes to dining well, and the neighborhoods that attract the most tourists tend to have the highest percentage of bland national chains and the lowest of decent food. So if you accidentally leave this book in your hotel (or, heaven forbid, at home), use the Manhattan equivalent of the "truck-stop rule": Go to the neighborhoods where the locals live, and look for the restaurants with lines out the door. In this way, you'll be doing just what New Yorkers do: Though we hate lines, we rarely patronize restaurants that don't have them.

THE QUEST FOR GOOD MEALS: As elsewhere in this book, I've grouped my selections geographically, starting with the most popular tourist areas (which aren't, I need to repeat, the best areas for tasty cuisine or low prices) and proceeding to the outlying Manhattan areas where, for one reason or another, you may happen to be (like the Financial District). My discussion here is limited to the island of Manhattan, but in the index I've included restaurants from other chapters and other boroughs that you may wish to try. And helpful symbols will appear next to the names of my restaurant choices, with dollar signs indicating the general cost of the restaurant:

$: Main courses for $8 or less
$$: Main courses for $9 to $14
$$$: Main courses for $15 to $21
$$$$: Main courses $22 and over

and stars for those selections deemed to have special merit:

No stars: Good
★: Very good
★★: Excellent
★★★: Not to be missed

Restaurant Hours

Restaurants in Manhattan tend to serve lunch between 11:30am and 2:30pm and dinner from 5:30 to 11pm, 7 days a week. When that is *not* the case, I have included information on hours. Otherwise, simply assume that the place you've chosen will be open at those times.

My picks are listed in ascending order of cost, starting with the cheapest, so that you can quickly choose a restaurant charging what you want to pay. If all you crave is a quick bite, start with the opening selections. When you're ripe for something more elaborate, move down the text.

TIMES SQUARE (THE THEATER DISTRICT)

You'll likely be near the Broadway theaters at some point in your stay, and in need of a meal. But this is perhaps the only Manhattan area where good restaurants of skill and dedication are greatly outnumbered by the do-it-by-rote places designed only for tourists. The top selections are pearls in a sea of mediocrity, and it's often important to know where NOT to eat.

Tops on that list are obviously the Olive Trees, Bubba Gumps, Mickey D's, and Red Lobsters that add to the neon in Times Square. Every time I walk by and see the masses crowding in to one of these places, I have the urge to physically yank these tourists (no actual New Yorker would be caught dead in one of these places) by the elbow, pull them out into the street, and walk them calmly to one of the restaurants below. In a city with multitudes of unique local restaurants, run by the most ambitious and talented chefs in the nation, it absolutely floors me that visitors would even consider eating at a chain they can visit in their own hometown.

Not only do these corporate chains serve mediocre, pre-frozen, highly processed food, they're often more expensive for what you get than at the local eateries. And yet they dominate the major avenues directly facing the alluring neon signs and big screens of the Square itself. If you can drag yourself away from the lights, however, you'll find four really good picks on the side streets right off the square (and a larger number of choices just one and two avenues east and west of the "Great White Way").

$ For a quick but filling bite, the cheapest, well-prepared burger ($3.45) in the Times Square area is had at the **Edison Café** (228 W. 47th St., right off Times Sq.; ☎ 212/840-5000; closes Mon–Sat at 9:30pm, and 6:30pm on Sun; 1, 2, 3, N, R, Q, S to Times Sq.), the place that was immortalized in 2001 in "45 Seconds from Broadway," the worst comedy Neil Simon ever wrote (trust me, I suffered through the first act). It's a genuinely weird place—a scruffy diner, complete with fake wood Formica-paneled booths, plopped down in the midst of a grand hall, its vaulted ceilings covered with bas-relief putti and painted bright pink and baby blue. It's also probably the only diner in the city that has a section roped off for

Midtown, Chelsea & Flatiron District Dining

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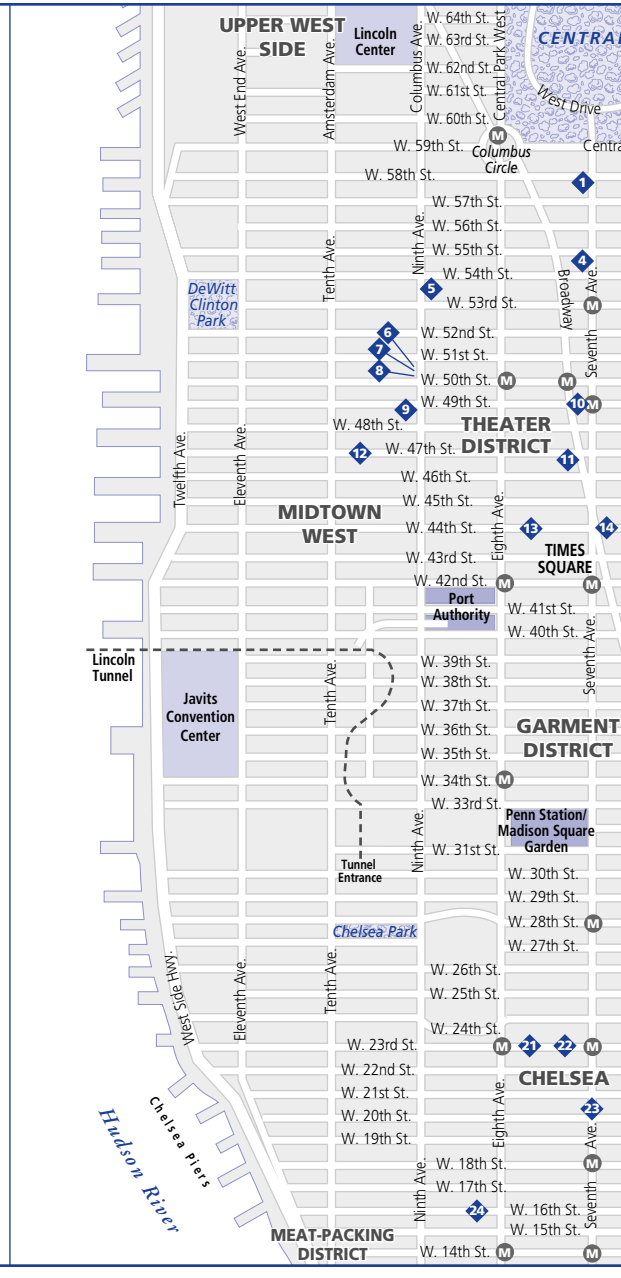

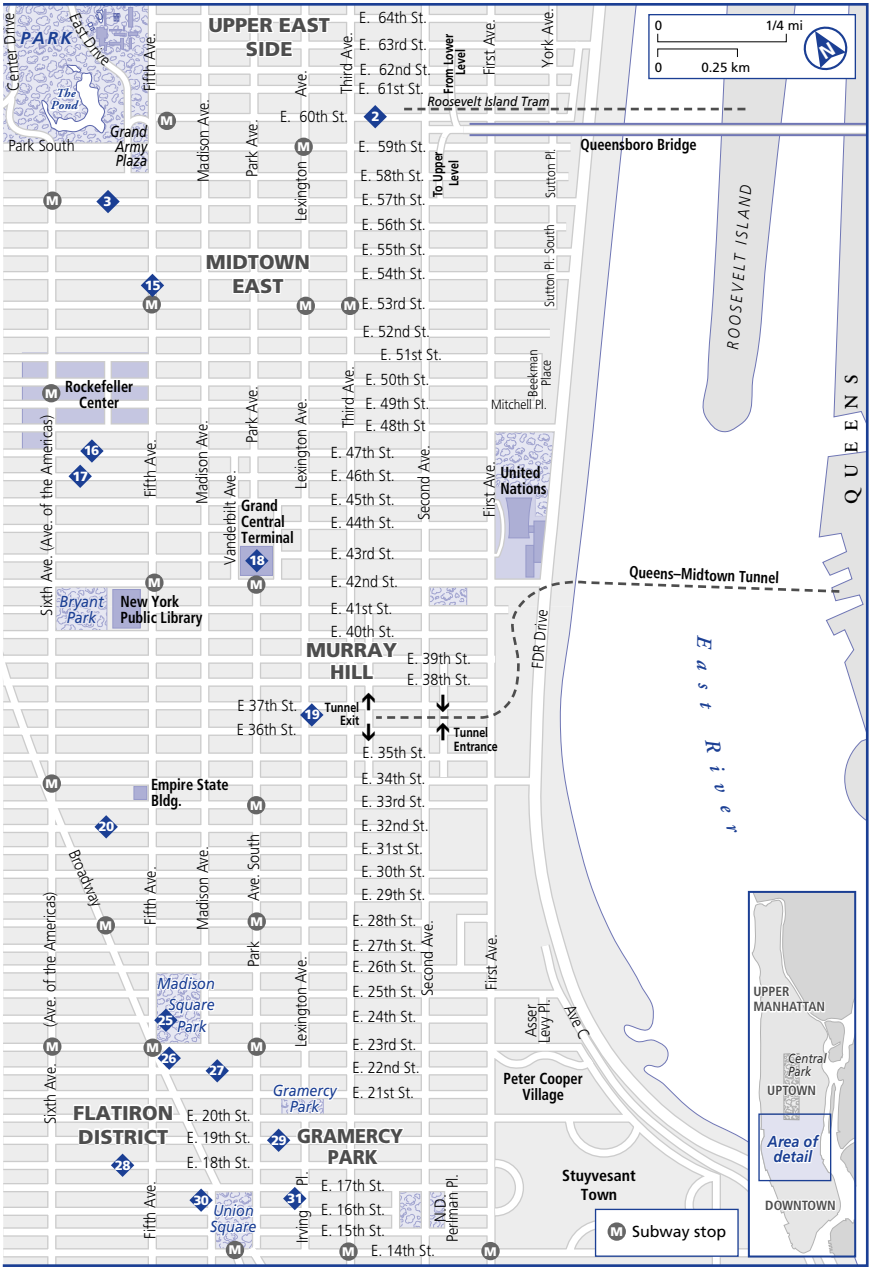
UPPER EAST SIDE
MIDTOWN EAST
MURRAY HILL
FLATIRON DISTRICT
GRAMERCY PARK
PARK
East Drive
Center Drive
The Pond
Grand Army Plaza
Park South
Fifth Ave.
Madison Ave.
Park Ave.
Lexington Ave.
Third Ave.
Second Ave.
First Ave.
York Ave.
Sixth Ave. (Ave. of the Americas)
Broadway
Park Ave. South
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E. 14th St.
From Lower Level
To Upper Level
Roosevelt Island Tram
Queensboro Bridge
Sutton Pl.
Sutton Pl. South
Beekman Place
Mitchell Pl.
ROOSEVELT ISLAND
QUEENS
United Nations
Grand Central Terminal
Vanderbilt Ave.
Rockefeller Center
Bryant Park
New York Public Library
Queens–Midtown Tunnel
FDR Drive
East River
Tunnel Exit
Tunnel Entrance
Empire State Bldg.
Madison Square Park
Gramercy Park
Union Square
Irving Pl.
N.D. Perlman Pl.
Asser Levy Pl.
Ave. C
Peter Cooper Village
Stuyvesant Town
UPPER MANHATTAN
Central Park
UPTOWN
Area of detail
DOWNTOWN
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VIPs—the Broadway producers, directors, and actors who make this an unofficial clubhouse. Though you can get all the diner standards here, including that perfectly serviceable burger ($3.45), you may want to stick with the central European specials—luscious blintzes ($6.95) and matzo Brie ($6.95, a comforting scramble of eggs, onions, and matzo meal)—that give this place its nickname, the "Polish Tearoom."

$ John's Times Square ★ kids (260 W. 44th St., between Broadway and Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/391-7560; www.johnspizzerianyc.com; reservations recommended; 1, 2, 3, N, R, Q, S to Times Sq.), about a half-block west of Broadway, has the best pizza in the area, served in a soaring, elegant space that was once a church (you can still see the lovely stained-glass windows in places). Like its downtown cousin (at 278 Bleeker St., in Greenwich Village), John's serves only large full pies big enough for two—no slices—so bring an appetite, because these are potently tomatoey, charred, thin-crusted circles of delight (and reasonable at $10 to $14 per pie, more if you want extra toppings). You can also order salads and pastas, but it's the pizza that's exceptional.

$–$$ Ever see that Japanese film, *Tampopo?* The one about the couple who spent their time tramping from one ramen place to another searching for the perfect noodle? I've always fantasized that the hunters in the film might one day leave Japan and end their search just 7 short blocks up from 42nd Street at **Sapporo** ★★ kids (152 W. 49th St., off Seventh Ave.; ☎ 212/869-8972; R, Q to 49th St., 1 to 50th St.), which certainly has the best Japanese noodles I've ever had (and looks a bit like the ramen shops in the film, crowded with legions of office workers earnestly slurping their soups while chefs manically shout to one another in Japanese behind the light wood counter). Portions are sumo-sized: huge, steaming bowls of broth with a tangle of noodles, corn, scallions, and (in the nonvegetarian versions) slices of pork (from $6.75). For starters, try the *gyoza* dumplings ($4.25), and if you're not in a noodle mood, the pork cutlet curry is also quite good ($8.35). Sapporo is a good choice for kids as they'll love slurping the long noodles (just don't order them the *tantan-men,* which is a scrumptious but somewhat spicy sesame soup, $8).

$$–$$$ Close to a number of famous theaters on the east side of Times Square, **Virgil's Real BBQ** kids (152 W. 44th St., right off Seventh Ave.; ☎ 212/941-9494; www.virgilsbbq.com; reservations recommended; 1, 2, 3, N, R, Q to Times Sq.) serves up bona fide, South-of-the-Mason-Dixon-Line barbecue smoked for up to 12 hours in a "Southern Pride" smoker. Platters, which come with two side dishes, can easily serve two hungry people (I've never been able to finish one on my own). Ranging from $15 up to $21, they cover all of the classics of 'cue, from Carolina pulled pork ($17) to sliced Texas beef brisket ($19), and use recipes the owners discovered during a pilgrimage they took across the South before opening up in 1994. You wash it all down with brew from one of the most extensive beer and ale menus in the city, in a checked-oilcloth, bi-level setting that is pure Tennessee. The noise level (high) makes this an ideal place to take the kids, as there's no chance they could disturb anyone here.

JUST WEST OF TIMES SQUARE, ON EIGHTH & NINTH AVENUES

$–$$ Having exhausted the possibilities a half-block or less from Times Square, we turn our attention to nearby Eighth and Ninth avenues (the very shortest walk away from the theaters), where dozens of small local eateries offer tasty cuisine from all corners of the globe. One of the best is **Pam Real Thai** (404 W. 49th St., right off Ninth Ave.; ☎ 212/333-7500; C, E to 50th St.), which supplies—splendidly—what the name of the restaurant promises: real Thai food (a rarity in New York, where sugar too often substitutes for spice). Be careful with your reply when they ask if you want your dinner spicy, because they mean business: The fiery fare will drain your sinuses (in fact, there's a constant symphony of patrons blowing their noses and clearing their throats). But even the most combustible dishes are tremendously flavorful, loaded with fresh vegetables, sweet coconut milk, and complex spices. I usually make a meal of the appetizers, soups, and salads, which are more successful than the curries. Particularly good is the *som tum* ($4.95), a green papaya salad that's big enough for a main dish, and sweet, sour, spicy, and everything in between. Or try the *tom kha gai* soup ($3.75), a creamy lime-and-coconut delight, or the *yums* (meat and seafood salads for $6–$10), which are truly . . . well, yummy. While this isn't a place for a special-occasion dinner—the decor's too plain for that—the service is speedy enough for you to eat here before the theater, make the trek east, and get to your seats in time.

$–$$ For a quick lunch or breakfast in a unique setting, you could try **Carve** (760 Eighth Ave. on the corner of 47th St.; ☎ 212/730-4949; www.carve.cc; N, R to 49th St., 1 to 50th St.), an elaborate gourmet sandwich joint with its own hidden roof garden. Carve has worked out a sweet deal with the China Club nightclub, just two doors down: From noon until 5pm patrons can use the club's fancy rooftop garden and chinoiserie-laden inside space (lots of red lacquer, fringed lamps, and Buddha sculptures) for their picnic meals. The imaginative sandwiches were created by chef Eban Ross, a graduate of the French Culinary Institute; my favorite is the Fourth of July Picnic ($8.50), which piles spicy, crunchy fried chicken with sweet corn slaw and a tangy bourbon-BBQ mayonnaise. If you come for breakfast, the roof will be closed, but the shop itself is a relatively pleasant place to munch your wafflewich (luscious malted waffles sandwiched with caramelized bananas and Nutella for $7); a vegetable frittata ($5); or a sensible bowl of yogurt, granola, and berries ($3). Carve also serves dinner until 9pm, but the roof closes at 5pm.

$–$$ A longish walk west of the Square, near the corner of Tenth Avenue, **Meskerem** (468 W. 47th St.; ☎ 212/664-0520; C, E to 50th St.) serves up bona fide Ethiopian food. If you've never had that cuisine before, let me tell you it's a real experience. The waiter arrives with a large round platter of *injera* (a spongy, bubbly bread made from fermented teff, which is a ryelike grain) upon which are mounded piles of stew. No silverware is supplied; instead, you scoop up the various stews with pieces of the bread, savoring the alternately spicy, sour, and garlicky flavors. Couples can easily share a Meskerem combo ($14), which will allow them to sample two beef stews, a lamb dish, and both a spicy and a milder

lentil stew. The lemony-tasting *lega tibs* ($12, lamb cooked with white wine and rosemary) is a good addition to the plate should you have a larger group (or you could simply double the combo plate). Be aware that dishes that come with *berbere* sauce have a slow rising heat to them that will catch up with you.

$$ The food is just as unusual and appealing at **Rinconcito Peruano Restaurant** (803 Ninth Ave., between 53rd and 54th sts.; ☎ 212/333-5685; closes 9pm Sun–Thurs, 10pm Fri–Sat; E, C to 50th St.), a simple little Latin American eatery with an extremely laid-back (read: slow) waitstaff, who nevertheless are friendly and helpful in interpreting the foreign menu. I first visited here with my Peruvian friend Roxana, who kept tearing up as each dish arrived, transported back to Lima—and her far-away family—with each bite. Though she felt that some of the dishes weren't spicy enough, she found them all to be quite authentic. I'll go further than that: They're delicious, especially the *papa a la Huancina* (boiled potatoes topped with eggs and topped with a spicy-enough-for-me yellow cream-cheese sauce, $5); and the *chicha morada,* a nonalcoholic beverage made with the purple corn of the region that tastes like an exotic blend of lemonade and raspberry juice ($1.50 per glass). You'll note that soy sauce is a major ingredient here, as is fried rice; this east-meets-west pairing is actually not a New York phenomenon—there are many Peruvians of Chinese ancestry and the two cuisines have melded over the years.

$–$$ There are no concessions made for American tastes at **Grand Sichuan International Midtown** ★★★ (745 Ninth Ave., between 50th and 51st sts.; ☎ 212/582-2288; reservations recommended; C, E to 50th St.), an experience that will blow a hole through what you thought you knew about Chinese food. The flavors here are extreme, at times almost violently spicy, deeply sour, or emphatically citrusy. This is where "Mao's home cooking" (as the menu puts it) is served up, and the results are exciting. Start with an order of "green parrot with a red mouth," actually a vegetarian sauté of pea shoots in a tart lemon sauce that's bracing and refreshing at the same time ($5). Follow it, if you dare, with sour string beans with minced pork ($8.95, but the serving is big enough for three to share), a platter of scorchingly hot but piquant chopped string beans with little bits of meat. Also recommended are the delicately sweet sautéed pumpkin family-style

When the Discount's Not Worth It

You gotta know who to trust. NYC & Company, the official tourist board of the city, has a lot of great advice for travelers, but when it comes to restaurants, plug your ears. Among the reams of info they pass out is a "savings guide" listing restaurants that give discounts to tourists. Every one of these establishments is either past its prime . . . or never had one. Use the list to figure out which eateries to avoid; the small savings offered simply won't be worth it. Also ignore any restaurant that hands out fliers in Times Square: There's a reason they have to go to such desperate lengths to advertise.

(another huge dish for $7.95; order it mild) and the light but tasty chicken with spinach soup ($4.95). You eat all of this in a dignified if uninspired Chinese restaurant, surrounded (usually) by Chinese ex-pats.

$$–$$$ If Grand Sichuan sounds too extreme, go just 1 block uptown to **Uncle Nick's** (747 Ninth Ave., between 50th and 51st sts.; ☎ 212/245-7992; C, E to 50th St.), which does Greek food right: with fresh ingredients and simple recipes. All of those Mediterranean classics, plus a full line of grilled fish, are on the menu here, and you can't go wrong with any of the dips (served with delightfully warm pita) or anything they throw on the sizzling grill that dominates the front of this railroad-car-shaped restaurant. A full meal will cost between $10 and $18; if you're not that hungry you can skip the appetizers, as every entrée comes with a heaping side salad. Though the room can get loud—noise can sure bounce off exposed brick walls—it's a pleasant place to dine, and very quick if you've got a show to catch.

$$–$$$ For that big night out, the one you get dressed up for and go to the theater, you want a restaurant with seriously gourmet food in an elegant atmosphere near the Great White Way. I'd recommend **Roberto Passon** ★★ (741 Ninth Ave. at 50th St.; ☎ 212/582-5599; www.nycrg.com; reservations recommended; C, E, R, W to 50th St.), which is named for the well-known New York restaurateur who has nine other popular, Italian joints in his stable. But none of the rest come close to touching the mastery and warmth of this eponymous eatery. It features the cuisine of Friuli, the area of Italy closest to and most influenced by Austria; thus, the food has a pleasant heaviness that is unusual for Italian food (Friuli is not a region of olive groves, so lard is often used in the cooking instead of olive oil). The massive white asparagus appetizer ($8, share it), for example, comes not only with prosciutto, but a poached egg perched in the middle of the plate. It's then sprinkled with Parmesan cheese and doused with brown butter, and the richness of the dish is extraordinary. The monkfish is also wrapped in prosciutto ($17), a seductive mix of surf and turf, swimming atop a piquant white wine sauce. The pastas are especially good—and happily cost $2 to $3 less than at other neighborhood restaurants. Even the look of this restaurant is just right, with its simple but stately white drapes in tall windows, its candle-lit tables, and its racks and racks of wine bottles giving the whole enterprise the air of abundance and comfort. A top choice in the neighborhood.

JUST EAST OF TIMES SQUARE, FROM BROADWAY TO FIFTH AVENUE

$ A number of fine restaurants east of Times Square cater less to tourists than to the legions of office workers and retail salespersons who toil in that area. In New York's famed "Diamond District" (the countless diamond merchants on 47th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.), a number of hidden, upstairs kosher eateries serve a large population of Hasidic Jewish jewelers who staff and often own the stores here. The best of these is also the most hidden, **Taam Tov** (46 W. 47th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves., on the fourth floor; ☎ 212/768-8001; www.nytaamtov.com; closed weekends and after 5pm weekdays, 4pm Fridays; B, D, F to Rockefeller

Center), which you enter through the "Exchange" jewelry store (look for the number, not the name, as many of the stores have "exchange" in their name), ascending an unmarked elevator in the middle of the store. The cuisine here is Uzbekistani—bet you never thought you'd be trying *that* when you came to the Big Apple—and it's very simple, very flavorful fare, reminiscent of what you'd find at a Middle Eastern restaurant, with a dash of deli thrown in for good measure. There are heaping fresh salads ($3), skewers of well-spiced lamb, chicken, or beef kebabs ($2.99 including a side dish), stuffed cabbage ($6.99), meat- and carrot-laden rice pilafs ($5.99), and soups like Grandma used to make, featuring as much chunky veggies and meats as broth ($3.99). On each table is a homemade hot sauce that is more tomatoey than spicy and should be used generously. Taam Tov itself is a plain-looking place, with plastic tablecloths and framed prints on the wall, but it may well have the highest table occupancy in New York at lunchtime. It's an adventure to eat here among all the wigged women and cell-phone-toting jewelry dealers, who never stop doing business, even at lunch.

$–$$ A nearby ethnic restaurant that has the Indian market sewn up (and many Indians work close to the Diamond District) is **Rangole** (41 W. 46th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/719-3474; N, R to 49th St.), which serves the cuisine of Southern India. I particularly like it because they have on the menu an item I've only encountered at the homes of my Indian friends. It's called *chaat* and it's a wonderful snack mix of crackers, diced potatoes, chickpeas with yogurt, a sweet red sauce, and a fiery green sauce that is habit forming. It's offered on the $7.95 lunch buffet and at night for $4.95. There's also the usual assortment of curries and tandoori dishes ($8.95–$14), but with no punches pulled for American tastes: Here you get the authentic singe of real Indian cooking, and it's a delight.

NORTH OF TIMES SQUARE, NEAR CARNEGIE HALL

$$$ If you don't make it down to Katz's Delicatessen on the Lower East Side, but are determined to have authentic deli food while in New York, your only real choice is the **Carnegie Deli** (854 Seventh Ave., at 55th St.; ☎ 800/334-3606 or 212/757-2245; http://carnegiedeli.com; N, R, Q to 57th St.). At Katz's, as I've pointed out below, the dish to order is corned beef. Here you want to go for the pastrami, preferably in a Reuben ($21). You'll notice that the price is pretty hefty for a sandwich, but that's because no one can ever finish one of these pound-and-a-half meat Cadillacs on their own; order one and share it with Mom, Pop, and the kids. Be sure to try an old-fashioned egg cream (a classic deli drink of seltzer, milk, and chocolate syrup).

SOUTH OF TIMES SQUARE, VICINITY OF EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

$$$ It's endlessly fascinating to watch different ethnic groups adopt areas of the city as their own, re-creating the look and feel of their homelands in just 1 or 2 short blocks. In the area of that most American of icons, the Empire State Building, a small replica of Seoul has popped up on 32nd Street between Broadway and Fifth, and it has that "vertical" look so typical of Asian cities, with stores and restaurants housed not only on the ground floors but on upper stories

as well, trumpeting their existence with huge window signs that grow bigger the higher in the building they are. This is where you should come and eat if you're in this part of town (there really are few other choices) and my favorite among the Korean restaurants—though they're all good—is also the oldest, **New York Kom Tang Kal Bi House** ★ (32 W. 32nd St., between Broadway and Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/947-8482; N, O, R, B, D, F to 34th St.); it occupies three stories on what was once the spot where Bergdorf and Goodman tailors plied their trade (before they opened the department store). Unlike other Korean barbecue places, here you grill your meal over real coals (rather than gas jets), brought to the table in a tray along with the eight small side dishes that accompany each meal. The waiter will lay out your meat for you on the grill and even flip it over when it's time, giving you advice on which condiments to use when you wrap your meats in the large lettuce leaves provided. It's best to eat here with a group, because two orders of barbecue (the minimum allowed for this dish) will cost $20 each and can easily feed four people, especially if you dig into the accompanying (no extra charge) side dishes (including pickled vegetables and cabbage, bean sprouts in vinaigrette, and small dried fish—most are more flavorful than fiery). There's no need to order appetizers, as the entrees are more than filling.

IN MIDTOWN EAST, BOTH NORTH OF GRAND CENTRAL STATION & INSIDE IT

$$ The great Broadway composer Stephen Sondheim wrote a song called "The Ladies Who Lunch" that begins with a boozy toast to the wealthy women who spend their days doing little more than shopping for hats and "planning a brunch." Though the song was penned in 1975, those ladies still exist. Their natural habitat, at lunch and teatime at least, is the **Tea Box at Takashimaya** ★★ (693 Fifth Ave., near 54th St.; ☎ 212/350-5179; closed Sun and after 6pm; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central), set in the basement of one of the most expensive department stores on the planet, in a room with burnished silver walls and a linen-draped ceiling that just screams "money." Despite the surrounding excess, meals here are quite affordable, starting at just $9.75 for a chichi sandwich or salad plate. The cuisine is a subtle and refined fusion of Japanese and Continental fare with such delicacies as shrimp marinated in tea ($13), smoked salmon "sandwiches" on beds of pressed rice ($9.75), and a trio of lightly spiced, gem-colored soups in tiny shot glasses ($5.75). At teatime, a small pot of unusual tea and a plate of buttery cookies will run you all of $6.50.

$$–$$$ If you come into the city by train or just happen to be in the vicinity of Grand Central, consider the famed **Oyster Bar** ★ (Dining Concourse of Grand Central Station, 42nd St., between Lexington Ave. and Vanderbilt; ☎ 212/490-6650; www.oysterbarny.com; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central). Opened in 1913, this Gilded Age holdover has changed very little in nearly a century, and the architecture—a series of swooping, tiled vaults that always remind me of the grand crypts of some European cathedrals—still impresses people. Don't bother going to the restaurant side; you want to be able to see the handwritten menu above the shelling station (on the right as you enter), where the best choices will be laid out. There will be fresh oysters and clams, flown in from all parts of North

The Burger Wars

In Gotham, the question of which pizza is best can lead to fist fights, but there's a more interesting competition among burgers, which can range from haute to healthy, greasy to great. Here are my nominees for the best between two buns:

- **Shake Shack** ★★ (outdoors in Madison Sq. Park, off 23rd St. between Broadway and Madison Ave.; daily, Apr–Nov, rain or shine; $). At near-McDonald's prices—just $3.25 for a single—you get a just-big-enough patty, loosely knit of sirloin and brisket ground across the street at owner Danny Myer's much snootier restaurant, 11 Madison Park. The resulting burger is juicy and tasty and perfectly sided with crisp fries and a "concrete" shake of custard that's made fresh throughout the day. One tip: There's no need to pony up an extra dollar for a "shack burger," as the special sauce adds nothing. Here's a perfect "picnic in the park" burger.
- **Corner Bistro** (331 W. 4th St., near Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/242-9402; A, E, C, to 14th St., L to Eighth Ave.; $). The common consensus among New Yorkers is that the Corner Bistro has the best burgers in the city, and their "bistro burger" is a Goliath: an inch-and-a-half thick, dripping with juice, and topped with quality cheese, pickles, raw onion, a full lettuce leaf, and a tomato slice. I personally prefer a more even ratio of bun to burger, but for those who think bigger is better, this Village bar is the place to go.
- **Burger Joint** (118 W. 57th St., between Sixth and Seventh aves.; ☎ 212/245-5000; closed Sun; N, O, R to 57th St.; $). A greasy spoon among silver spoons, the Burger Joint is hidden behind a curtain in the lobby of the ultra-swank Parker Meridien Hotel. Pull back that curtain and you enter a hidden diner that looks like it was yanked off some side street in Detroit. But it serves up the juiciest, most perfectly charred burgers ($5.50) in the western half of Midtown. Order them with "the works" (red onions, lettuce, tomato, pickles, mustard, and mayo) for not a cent extra.
- **Rare** (303 Lexington Ave. at 37th St.; ☎ 212/481-1999; www.rarebarandgrill.com; 6 to 33rd St.; $$–$$$$). Longing for some truffle butter or a hunk of foie gras between your burger and bun? Rare has it. At this Midtown pub, the burger goes gourmet with all kinds of fancy-pants dressings, condiments, and recipes (including a Kobe beef "burger" encased in puff pastry for $21). If you don't want to get carried away with all of that, you could just go for a perfectly cooked, freshly ground patty between two solid but soft buns (the classic at $8.50)—down-home and haute are done equally well here.

America ($1.35–$3 each); shellfish pan-roasts and stews (from $9.45); and, of course, chowders of all kinds (from $4.75). Ignore the paper menu entirely (for some reason, everything that comes out of the kitchen is overcooked and tepidly sauced); confine yourself to the list of foods that is prepared right at the bar and you'll have a real, old-fashioned feast.

$ Though it's mainly for ice cream and not for a meal, I can't help adding (a bit out of order in terms of price) this next stop—a New York institution. If you plan to shop at Bloomingdales, allot a good 45 minutes to an hour to brave the line and eat at **Serendipidity 3** ★★ kids (225 E. 60th St., off Third Ave.; ☎ 212/838-3531; www.serendipity3.com; 4, 5, 6, F, N, R, W to 59th St.), a good ol'-fashioned ice cream parlor complete with Tiffany-style lamps and a toy shop that you have to pass to get in and out (quite a feat when you have sugar-crazed kids in tow). The dish to order here (one tureen of it will easily satisfy two) is the deservedly famous Frozen Hot Chocolate ($7.50), a slushy, utterly satisfying chocolate soup. You can get an idea of the magical effects of that treat if you rent the slightly treacly John Cusack comedy *Serendipity,* which was filmed here.

UNION SQUARE & THE FLATIRON DISTRICT

It's just in the last decade or so that these two areas have really become destinations for dining. Today there are scores of chic little places to choose from, many housed in what had been the first department stores of the U.S. way back in the 1840s (the area was called "Ladies Mile" back then, both for the big shops—notice the large plate glass windows on many facades here—and for the houses of prostitution that were housed above the stores). For reality TV fans, this area defines the dog-eat-dog world of Manhattan restaurants, as the ill-fated Rocco's of *The Restaurant* was filmed right on 18th Street, between Broadway and Park Avenue South.

$–$$ Though Rocco de Spirito wasn't able to thrive in the area, another celebrity chef, Tom Collicchio, has claimed the Flatiron District as his own, with three extremely popular eateries all within 1 square block. The budget option of the group is **'wichcraft** ★ (49 E. 19th St., closer to Park Avenue South; ☎ 866/942-4272; www.wichcraftnyc.com; closes at 6pm; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, L to Union Sq.), an upscale sandwich shop where that knotty problem of how to keep food between wedges of bread from tasting dry has happily been solved. They do it by using only artisan, solid, sometimes nutty breads from fine bakeries around the city; and layering sandwiches with such soft, moist spreads as goat cheese, soft-cooked eggs, and pesto. In the middle are a range of meats and vegetables, from slow-roasted pork and meatloaf to marinated white anchovies or black trumpet mushrooms and white truffle fondue. There is pleasant seating at the Flatiron District location, though no table service. Recently, three outposts were opened in Chelsea (224 Twelfth Ave., at 27th St.; ☎ 212/780-0577); TriBeCa (397 Greenwich St., corner of Beach St.; ☎ 212/780-0577); and Bryant Park (Sixth Ave., between 41st and 42nd sts.; ☎ 212/780-0577).

$–$$ For a picnic of salads rather than sandwiches, turn west to **City Bakery** ★★ kids (3 W. 18th St., right off Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/366-1414; www.thecitybakery.com; closes Mon–Fri at 7pm, Sat at 6pm, Sun at 5pm; 4, 5, 6, N,

Q, R, L to Union Sq., or 1 to 18th St.), which, as you might imagine, is a prime spot for cookies and pastries (there's even a tiny room devoted entirely to chocolate where the aroma's so intense it's downright erotic). City Bakery is a vegetarian heaven, with perhaps the best salad bar in the city, offering such healthy and unusual delights as roasted cauliflower; jicama mango and lime salad; parsnip chips; bok choy with enoki mushrooms; crunchy lotus root, cucumber, and bean sprout salad; and so on (cost is by weight at $13 per lb.). The menu changes daily but always includes a salmon option, a chicken plate, and macaroni and cheese (for the kids) along with all of the green stuff. If you want to eat your food here, you'll do it elbow to elbow, as this huge loft space is always jam-packed. Parents will want to sit near the stairway so that their kids can explore the children's play area underneath it.

$–$$ Right on Union Square, **Republic** (37 Union Sq. West; ☎ 212/627-7172; www.thinknoodles.com; N, Q, R, 4, 5, 6, L to Union Sq.) is chic and cheap, with a menu heavy on Asian noodles. Its look is "Communist Russia—industrial space, long communal tables—meets New York fashion shoot," thanks to the oversized photos of beautiful people eating noodles that grace the walls. Much of the clientele are the models and photographers who work at nearby agencies, drawn here by the healthy dishes (there are lots of salad choices and freshly squeezed juices) and the low, low prices (all of the massive, toothsome noodle dishes cost a mere $7–$9). There's a happening bar scene as well, later in the evening.

$$ Unusual rolls, and lines out the door, are the hallmarks of the dining experience at **Yama** ★ (49 Irving Place at 17th St.; ☎ 212/475-0969; www.yamarestaurant.com; closed Mon; N, Q, R, 4, 5, 6, L to Union Sq.) a plain Jane of a sushi restaurant squeezed into the basement of the building that once was home to Washington Irving. Despite its dull appearance, this place is always crowded thanks to oversized portions of swimmingly fresh sushi at slightly lower-than-normal rates. A multifish extravaganza of a roll, for example, one that might boast something red and something white, with a bit of *tobiko* (fish roe) and avocado thrown in as well, won't cost more than $6.50. For a simpler roll, the charge rarely goes above $4.50, and there are dozens of specials to mix up matters as well. Reservations are not accepted, so build in time for a wait.

$$$$ For a very special celebratory meal, you'll definitely want to consider **Charlie Palmers Kitchen 22** ★★★ (36 E. 22nd St., between Broadway and Park Avenue South; ☎ 212/228-4399 ; www.charliepalmer.com; N, R, 6 to 23rd St.), which may well be the best "sensible splurge" choice in the book, simply because there's no way to spend too much here (unless you're a big drinker). A reasonable $25 nets a three-course prix-fixe meal of truly gourmet fare, with customers having a choice of five appetizers and five main dishes (a tasting plate of three desserts completes the meal). The menu changes seasonally but the food always features imaginative pairings of ingredients, such as a chilled corn soup with actual popped corn added at the last second by the waiter; a beef carpaccio plate with olives, anchovies, and a sun-dried tomato aioli; or simple pan-roasted chicken enlivened by a distinctive artichoke pesto. The only downside here is that the restaurant does not take reservations, but you can call about half an hour in advance of your arrival and request to be placed on the list. This has usually

worked for me, though the narrow, stunningly lit dining room (the huge round lampshades that overhang each table are simply beautiful) is not big enough for large groups.

$$$–$$$$ Or try **Craftbar** ★★ (900 Broadway, at 20th St.; ☎ 212/461-4300; reservations recommended; N, R, 6 to 23rd St.), again from Tom Collicchio, which despite the name is a full-scale restaurant in an imposing high-ceilinged affair with panels of deep-red canvas and mission-style, dark wood tables giving the somewhat industrial space a touch of warmth. Just as at its sister sandwich place, the food is marvelous, using downright poetic ingredients such as pickled fiddleheads (a type of curlicued fern), peekytoe crab, pigeon, and quail (the last two are nested together in a tasty terrine and complemented by pickled lychees and purslane). While I've never been disappointed here, my favorites on the menu are the young pecorino fondue, really just a shallow dish of delicious melted cheese with hazelnuts and pepperoncini ($12); the terrine I mention above ($13); and the savory roasted duck with crepes and gooseberries ($28).

$$$–$$$$ My final "celeb chef" choice in this foodie neighborhood is Mario Batali's foray into Spanish cuisine, **Casa Mono** ★★★ (125 E. 17th St., at Irving Place; ☎ 212/253-2773; reservations recommended; 4, 5, 6, N, R, L to Union Sq.). If you don't like sharing, you won't like this lively tapas restaurant, where the act of digging your fork into your companion's plate and stealing the best bits is raised to an art. That's because many of the dishes are so exotic that it's the worst sort of culinary faux pas not to rotate the plates around the table so that everyone can have a try. And an adventurous palate is rewarded here—the more unusual the dish, the more delicious it tends to be. This certainly goes for the cockles with *huevos revueltos,* a savory blend of tiny in-shell clams, eggs, and sausage; the lustily sweet foie gras with rhubarb; and yes, the lamb's tongue, which is a symphony of textures and flavors—fried to a crisp on the edges, silken within, and sided by a refreshing salad of shaved celery and pickled Asian artichoke. Portions tend to be substantial, so you can keep the bill under control by ordering just two plates per person. Casa Mono shares the same sort of rustically elegant look that Batali's other eateries do, with dark wood paneling, rough wooden tables, and wine bottles everywhere. But it's much smaller than any of the other joints, so you'll want to make reservations well in advance. Even the 5:30 seating is jam-packed, and the host has an unfortunate habit of letting you know, as soon as you sit down, that there's a meter running on your table.

CHELSEA

With its galleries and gay bars, Chelsea is one of the best places in the city for just leaning back and taking in the view—the parade of bared bellies, tight T-shirts, and muscled men is nonstop. There are a lot of sexy-looking restaurants here, too, but with the exceptions noted below, it's a disappointing dining area, with very little in the way of creative cuisine or authentic ethnic eats.

$ For simply a fast meal hereabouts, consider **F&B** ★ kids (269 W. 23rd St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 646/486-4441; www.gudtfood.com; also at

Restaurant Week(s)

For 4 weeks each year—usually the last 2 weeks in June and January—New York's finest restaurants slash the cost of a three-course meal to just $25 at lunch, $35 at dinner. Started as a means of luring Democrats out of the convention hall and into the city during the 1992 Democratic Convention, the program proved so popular that it became a yearly tradition, and many other cities now hold "restaurant weeks" of their own. To get the best-quality meals, go with the eateries that offer food off their usual menu (rather than cheaper substitutes); you can ask what's for lunch when you call to make a reservation. To find out which restaurants are participating, go to **www.nycvisit.com**.

150 E. 52nd St., between Lexington and Third aves.)—the acronym stands for frites and beignets—a bricks-and-mortar paean to European street foods. Tops on the menu are the custom-made sausages topped by squiggles of brightly flavored sauces and mounds of vegetables. One of the most bedecked and satisfying is the "Great Dane" ($3.65), a neon-red, Danish pork sausage topped with crispy fried onions, lightly pickled cucumber slices, and a sweet but not cloying apple-tomato ketchup. The "Bavarian" ($3.65) features snappy bratwurst and sauerkraut. And there are smoked tofu dogs as well, such as the "Athenian" ($3.65), which is smothered in creamy hummus, julienned carrots, and black olives (it tastes better than it sounds). On the side, try the *haricots frites* ($2.95), a healthier take on french fries with green beans subbing for spuds. Though not fancy, the shop is quite modish with azure walls, fresh flowers on the eating counters (there are stools for diners), wine and beer service, and a pulsating Euro-pop and fusion soundtrack.

$$–$$$ One of the eateries to which our derogatory comments about Chelsea don't apply is **RUB** or **Righteous Urban Barbecue** ★★ (208 W. 23rd St., near Seventh Ave.; ☎ 212/524-4300; closed Mon; A, B, C to 23rd St.), a new addition to the dining scene that has quickly won acclaim for having the best barbecue in the city. Then again, owner Paul Kirk *always* wins when it comes to barbecue: He has seven World Barbecue Championships under his belt and was inducted into the Barbecue Hall of Fame in 1990. His food here is blue-ribbon quality, swooning-off-the-bone tender, and sided by a smoky, tartly sweet barbecue sauce that has a heat that sneaks up and subsides just as you're about to take the next bite. The only quibbles I have with this joint, probably the reason I give it two stars rather than three, are the service, which is friendly but glacially slow, and the lack of atmosphere. The place is so plain it would make a Texas roadhouse look chic. But those are small complaints, and for the heaping platters of food you get, served on round aluminum trays as big as pizza tins, you certainly get good value for the dollar. You can choose a platter with two sides (pick the sassy barbecued beans and the crisp and greaseless fried onions) and one meat for $15; add another meat and it's $18.75; and so on. ***Warning:*** Because the barbecue can take up to 14 hours to cook, they don't make

more when they run out for the evening. So if you want to have one of the really popular items (such as ribs), you'll have to get here early in the evening.

$$–$$$ Venturing east of Eighth Avenue, the neighborhood loses its party-hearty atmosphere and becomes a bit dour, but it has one major saving grace in **Le Zie** ★ (172 Seventh Ave., on the corner of 20th St.; ☎ 212/206-8686; www.lezie.com; 1 to 18th St.), a bustling, Venetian trattoria that brings to New York the fresh and slightly more exotic Italian tastes of that watery city (because Venice was a major trading route for many centuries, its cuisine incorporates a number of typically Asian spices). You'll see these many influences in the very Chinese version of red snapper (market price), cooked to silky perfection in a salt crust. Its signature dish, a sublime version of good ol' spaghetti and meatballs ($12), is chunky with bits of softened garlic and tomatoes, and I detected a hint of cinnamon and all-spice in the weightless meatballs. The Venetian-style bean soup is also unique, less chunky than the classic "pasta and fagiole" and more of a rich purée, delicately spiced, with just a few small nubs of pasta ($5.95). Though the front room is dignified and pleasant, ask if it's possible to sit in the back, in either the lushly romantic green garden or in the Galleria Room, with its high wood-beamed ceilings and dramatic works of art on the walls.

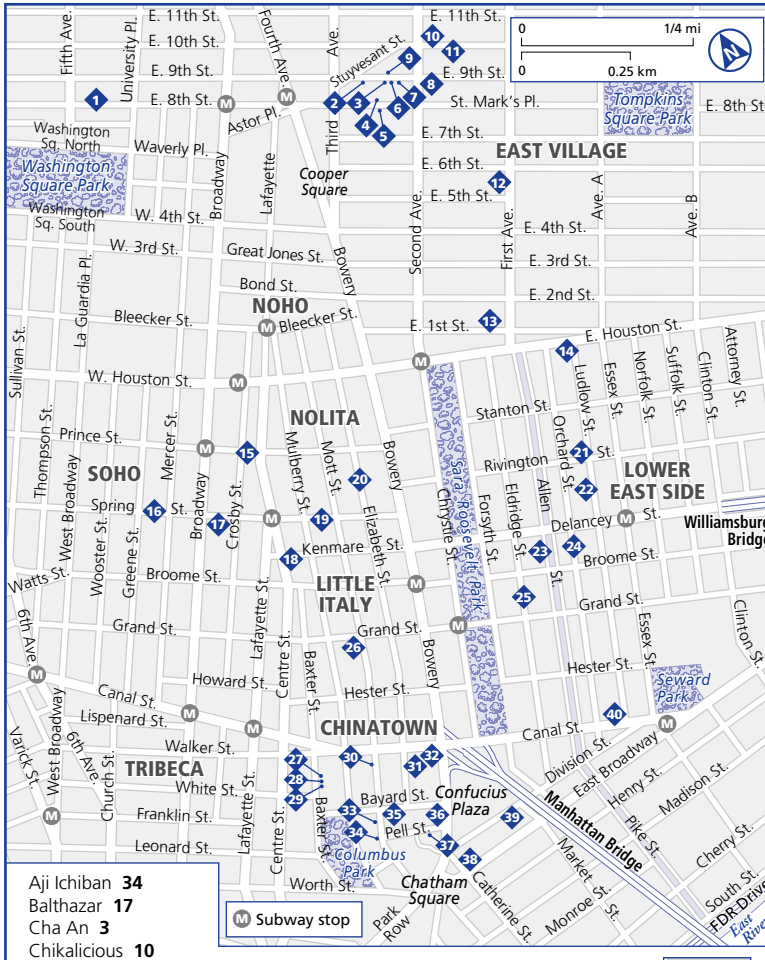
$$$ Eight blocks down Eighth Avenue, a little place called **Maroons** ★★★ (244 W. 16th St., off Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/206-8640; www.maroonsnyc.com; reservations recommended; L to Eighth Ave., or A, E, C to 14th St.) is slyly and quietly "desegregating" the Manhattan dining scene (in fact, until you eat here, you won't realize how homogenous most restaurants are). But Maroons, which takes its name from the bands of slaves who fought for their freedom in Jamaica, attracts a rainbow crowd: white and Asian gay men and women from the neighborhood, and young hetero couples out on dates, make up about half the clientele; the other 50% is African American. I know of no other restaurant in the city with quite this demographic and it's a testament to just how welcoming this stylish little converted brownstone is. It also speaks to the high quality of the food (the cocktails are killer, too). As the name suggests, the menu is divided between Caribbean and Southern specialties, many of which are outstanding. It's fun to mix and match, so pair the crisp and spicily sauced fried green tomatoes with an entree of even more fiery jerk chicken ($17); or go to town with fluffy cod-fish fritters ($8) followed by a juicy slab of meatloaf ($14). All are delish, especially when sided by Maroons' buttery, nonbitter collard greens (how do they do that?) and slightly peppery mac and cheese.

CHINATOWN

For a cheap, fresh, and tasty meal, there's no better area in the city than Chinatown, and we can thank the history of Chinese immigration for that.

Let me explain. In 1882, the U.S. Congress enacted what has to be one of the most shameful and cruel laws in the history of American jurisprudence: the Chinese Exclusion Act. The first law ever to be directed solely at one ethnic group—a group that had proved invaluable in the development of the economy of the Western United States (it was Chinese labor that built the rail lines there)—the act denied

Lower Manhattan Dining



Aji Ichiban **34**
Balthazar **17**
Cha An **3**
Chikalicious **10**
Chinatown Ice Cream Factory **35**
Congee Village **23**
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Malaysian Beef Jerky Co. **26**
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Soba Ya **9**
St Alps Teahouse **33**
Tasting Room **13**
Ten Ren Teahouse **30**
Thai Son **27**
Veselka **8**

Subway Directions

To get to most parts of Chinatown, you're going to have to hoof it a bit. The nearest subway stop for this neighborhood is the Canal Street Station served by the 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, and J trains. From here it's about 3 long avenue blocks to most of the eateries listed in this section.

the Chinese the right to apply for naturalization and denied new entry to Chinese immigrants who didn't already have family in the States.

The effect of the act was dramatic. Overnight, Chinese Americans became second-class citizens in the eyes of the law, and all of the men (95% of the Chinese Americans) who had come here hoping to eventually bring wives and family over, were in essence stranded. Chinatown became a "bachelor society," which, oddly enough, led to a boom in Chinese restaurants. You see, the Chinese immigrants had to work very hard just to survive, so there was little time for cooking. Without the support of a family, these men ended up eating all of their meals from street vendors or in small, cheap restaurants, and Chinatown became a neighborhood simply bristling with eating options. To accommodate the vast number of diners, many of whom were eating solo, the restaurants used Lilliputian tables, just big enough for one. You'll see these lonely table configurations in many of Chinatown's older restaurants even now, as restrictions on Chinese immigration continued all the way until 1965.

Today, a boom in immigration from all parts of Asia has made Chinatown one of the city's most vibrant and fast-growing neighborhoods. With the exception of some 4 short blocks, it has pretty much taken over Little Italy, and the hold is culinary as well as physical. There are no worthwhile restaurants left for Italian food in this area of the city; the latter is all "tourist" food, sloppily cooked, indifferently served (though there are still some good places to get cheeses and Italian cured meats that I'll list in our shopping chapter). But if you like Asian food, dining here can't be beat.

DIM SUM

The classic Chinatown meal is the dim sum brunch or lunch. Dim sum, for those who've never tried it, is a meal made up of many small dishes, primarily different sorts of dumplings and buns, a tradition that started in the tea houses that lined China's Silk Road many centuries ago (scholars believe the custom began shortly after A.D. 300, when the long-held notion that tea should not be accompanied by food fell out of favor). In China, as well as in Asian communities across the world, it remains a social occasion, a chance for family and friends to gather and talk. That may be why the words "dim sum" don't actually refer to food; they can be roughly translated as "a little bit of heart." Today, when you go for a dim sum brunch, it's likely that you'll be seated at a large round table with other diners, so don't be shy; use that seating as an opportunity to meet the locals.

$ Many really good dim sum joints are scattered across Chinatown; in fact, it's hard to go wrong with this type of cuisine. For a Hong Kong–style dim sum restaurant (where the food is wheeled through the dining room in carts with patrons choosing as they go by), your best choices are **Jing Fong** (20 Elizabeth St. between Elizabeth and Canal sts.; ☎ 212/964-5256), **The Golden Unicorn** (18 E. Broadway, between Catherine and Market sts.; ☎ 212/941-0911), and **HSF** (46 Bowery, off Canal St.; ☎ 212/374-1319). Jing Fong is the largest of the three by a hair, an enormous room that's two football fields long. It offers, along with cart service, a nice buffet featuring such delicacies as chicken feet (which taste oddly jellied), taro cakes, and freshly cooked clams in black bean sauce. The Golden Unicorn has multiple floors in a faceless building on East Broadway, one of the less touristy areas of Chinatown. You wait in the lobby until the hostess sends you up the elevator to your assigned dining floor. It's a tad less frenetic than Jing Fong, though the wait for tables here can be longer. HSF is the oldest of the three, having been around for over 3 decades, and according to a Chinatown resident I met, supplies many of the surrounding restaurants with their dumplings, a claim I've never been able to substantiate—though ever since he said it, I've thought that the food here does taste the freshest. Expect to pay between $10 and $15 for a full meal for two people of dumplings, rolls, sticky rice, and more, at any of the three places.

NEW TO NEW YORK VARIETIES OF CHINESE FOOD

$ Deep in the bowels of Chinatown, right next to the Manhattan Bridge overpass (when this neighborhood becomes chic, some genius will undoubtedly nickname it *MOBA*), is a tiny dynamo of a Fujian steam-table restaurant called **New Bai Wei Gourmet** ★★ (51 Division St., off Market St.; ☎ 212/925-1921; closed after 9pm). Just in the last decade, some 300,000 Fujians from southeastern China have entered the U.S., many settling in the New York area. They're still the "new immigrants on the block," and a restaurant like New Bai Wei illustrates that: The counter staff speak rudimentary English, you eat at folding tables on folding stools, and when you go to the front to order, you have to simply go with what looks good, as the explanations of what the 33 dishes are will be absolutely incomprehensible. It's a real adventure and I promise the food will make up for any discomfort you feel while ordering. For a mind-boggling $2.75 (!), you get rice, soup, and four different dishes. The last time I was here, I chose a handful of hard-shell crabs in a delicious gingery sauce, lightly sautéed pea shoots, and dry fried string beans with a hint of pepper; and then I asked the woman behind the counter to recommend one more. She pointed to a stew she called *"peekur"* and though I couldn't figure out what "peekur" means, it was my favorite: tangy strips of a bumpy something with fried tomatoes and mushrooms.

$ In the more central area of Chinatown, on Pell Street (which had been the street where all the bachelors got their haircuts; notice the large number of barbershops still there today), **Joe's Shanghai** ★ (9 Pell St., between Bowery and Mott sts.; ☎ 212/233-8888; there's also a not-quite-as-good uptown location at 24 W. 56th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.) is at the very center of the "soup dumpling" craze. Joe's was one of the first to bring to New York the puffy, puckered center dumplings that have literally swept the city (next to "bubble tea"—see below—they are by far the most popular new Chinese food). Eating them

involves a complicated ritual. You take one of those ladlelike Chinese spoons, carefully retrieve a dumpling from a bamboo steamer, leave it on your spoon, bite off the top, and then pour in a special sauce of soy, sweet vinegar, and slivered ginger. Then, even more carefully, take a delicate bite of the dumpling so its innards will squirt into your mouth (and if you're not fast enough, onto your shirt), a jet stream of lava-hot soup and sauce plus chive-laced pork and/or crab. Absolutely delicious, and worth it at $6.25. Joe's has a complete menu, of course, of other Shanghai dishes (try the slivered pork with dried bean curd and jalapeño for $8.95), but the dumplings are why you choose Joe's.

AN UNBEATABLE OLD FAVORITE

$–$$ Great New York Noodletown ★★★ (28 Bowery, at Bayard St.; ☎ 212/349-0923; daily 9am–4am) is a giant among noodle shops. It ain't much to look at: The lighting's too bright, the seats are crowded together, and the chairs and tables are getting flimsy from overuse, but there are few finer dining experiences to be had in this restaurant-crammed city. In fact, in the years I've been coming here, I've seen chefs from Nobu (one of the city's most celebrated Japanese restaurants), still in their chef's whites, dining here after their shifts were over. I couldn't see what they ordered, but I always go for the sautéed pea shoots ($9.95), a delicate, very green taste sensation; the salt-baked squid ($8.95), the seafood equivalent of potato chips, they're that light and crunchy; some slices off one of the ducks ($3.50) that hang in macabre style in the window; and the heat-packing Singapore chow fun ($5.95), an al dente, spicy mix of thin, long pasta, diced vegetables, and pork. Come prepared for a line, as the Noodletown doesn't take reservations.

CHINATOWN'S VIETNAM

$ One block west of Bayard is Baxter Street, which could be called the city's "Little Vietnam," with three really good Vietnamese restaurants: **Nha Trang** (87 Baxter St.; ☎ 212/233-5948); **New Pasteur** (85 Baxter St., between Bayard and Canal sts.; ☎ 212/608-3656); and **Thai Son** (89 Baxter St.; ☎ 212/732-2822). I've eaten at all of them, and there's not much difference between them (to my palate): You get a hearty, affordable meal of deeply flavorful entree-sized noodle soups ($4–$5), crabs with a finger-licking ginger and scallion sauce (market price), and cold summer rolls ($3.50, a bouquet of legumes wrapped in a white, cold pasta sheet and sided by a vinegary dipping sauce), all for practically nothing (expect to pay no more than $8 per person for a filling meal). Desserts at these places can be odd, but if you're game, try the Che Ba Mau, a parfait glass filled with condensed milk and (I kid you not) multicolored gummy worms, corn, and red beans. After the initial shock, you may just like it (I certainly do).

CHINATOWN'S FRENCH STANDOUT

$$–$$$ Set in an oddball area of Chinatown (in fact, some might consider this area the Lower East Side) is **Les Enfants Terribles** ★★ (37 Canal St., at the corner of Ludlow St.; ☎ 212/777-7518; Ⓕ to E. Broadway; reservations recommended), a terrifically sexy little place with one of the most physically beautiful and exotic-looking waitstaffs in the city, a clientele that looks (almost) as good as the servers, and a setting that's what I imagine Rick's Café from the movie *Casablanca* would look like if: a) it actually existed and b) it were updated to

today's sensibilities. There are palm fronds everywhere, African masks on the walls, dim lights, and a gold-leaf ceiling. The menu offers both French and Ivory Coast choices ranging from a filling mushroom tart with a creamy parsnip sauce ($12), to tart lime-braised chicken sided by a complementary spicy peanut sauce ($16), to the unpronounceable *Korhogofefemugou* ($19), chef Adhul Traore's interesting take on steak frites, dusted with African herbs. The specialty cocktails—made with either Brazilian *cachaca,* rum, or champagne—are velvety smooth but potent, and reasonable by Manhattan standards at $7 to $8 each.

EAST VILLAGE

Ethnic eats, NYU hangouts, young chefs striking out on their own—after Chinatown, this area and the Lower East Side (see below) are tops for budget dining (as well as fancier fare), and the East Village certainly has more than its fair share of superlative little restaurants, as well as a few classic picks.

$ The East Village is home to New York University, which has 12 official and utterly unnecessary cafeterias and cafes for students, as most of them seem to dine exclusively at **Dojo** (14 W. 4th St., at Mercer St., ☎ 212/505-8934; N, O, R to 8th St., or 6 to Astor Place; also at 24–26 St. Marks Place; N, R to 8th St., or 6 to Astor Place), a mildly Japanese health food canteen, with sit-down service and some of the cheapest prices in the city. For a pita pouch overflowing with chicken sukiyaki (chicken stir-fried with cellophane noodles and vegetables) and sided by a large and very good salad with ginger dressing, the cost is just $3.25; order stir-fried vegetables over brown rice with salad and you'll pay just $5.25. Also available: soy burgers ($2.75), shrimp tempura ($6.95), BBQ chicken ($6.95), and much more. Everything's tasty and served in pleasant brick-walled rooms with local art on the walls. One of the city's top values.

$ On Sixth Street, between First and Second avenues, is one of the city's three "Little Indias," neighborhoods where cardamom and ginger scent the air, and almost every restaurant you pass has either a sitar player in the window, or an Indian man outside eagerly waving you into his curry palace. Though you'll have a good, affordable meal at any of the restaurants along the block, I prefer to go around the corner to **Panna II** ★★ (93 First Ave., between 5th and 6th sts.; ☎ 212/598-4610; www.panna2.com; 6 to Astor Place or F to Second Ave.), which the *Village Voice* once called the "best unintentional art installation" in New York. It's a wacky-looking place. Over the years the owners have covered every possible inch of this small restaurant with Christmas lights, chile lights, hanging beach balls, Hawaiian leis, Mardi Gras–like paper, and other kitsch, packing the place so tightly with decorations that anyone over 5'8" has to duck to get to a seat. Once inside, you dine on delicious and outrageously cheap Indian food, with curries starting at just $3.75 and soups for 90¢. Even if you hadn't planned on visiting this neighborhood, it's worth traveling here to dine.

$–$$ Veselka (144 Second Ave., at the corner of 9th St.; ☎ 212/228-9682; www.veselka.com; 6 to Astor Place) is another NYU haunt, though it's also a popular spot for East Village hipsters, Goth guys and gals, families, businesspeople, and anybody who's ever had a deep need for cold borscht at 3am in the morning (it's

open 24/7). When Veselka debuted in 1954 the area was awash in Ukrainian diners, but many have since gone belly-up (or have upgraded to the point of assimilation), leaving this open, crowded, tall-windowed eatery the standard-bearer for solid, cheese-laden Eastern European fare. Though you can order American dishes here, it's better to stick with such old country favorites as *pierogis* (fried dumplings filled with either meat or cheese for $7.75), the sauerkraut-laced hunter's stew of kielbasa and veal ($12), or the best borscht in the city ($4.50 per bowl).

$$ Eating at my next choice is one of those "only in New York" experiences, an exercise in excess, and one of the most fun dining events in the city. The place is called **ChikaLicious** ★★★ (203 E. 10th St., right off Second Ave.; ☎ 212/995-9511; www.chikalicious.com; closed Mon; 6 to Astor Place), which sounds like a porn shop, I know, but is actually a dessert-only restaurant, owned by a diminutive pastry chef named Chika Tillman who presides from behind the central counter in this glossy, all-white restaurant (it reminds me a bit of the "Milk Bar" in the movie *A Clockwork Orange*). All customers get a three-course tasting menu for $12, which starts with an *amuse bouche* (literally, a small amusement for the mouth), goes on to a choice of eight main desserts, and finishes with petit fours. And what desserts they are! Ms. Tillman, who has baked at some of the top restaurants in the city (including posh Gramercy Tavern), has a rich imagination when it comes to food, and though the pairings she makes seem weird—molten chocolate tart with red peppercorn ice-cream (studded with little bits of pepper) and red-wine sauce; a Monet-like swirl of multicolored, multiflavored fruit compote; Earl Grey jelly with spicy cinnamon ice cream—they're right on. Better than that, actually; if desserts can be revelatory, these are. Spring for a dessert wine pairing ($7 more) to further enhance your visit.

$$–$$$ Though it's technically in the East Village (as it's just east of Fifth Ave.), **Otto** ★★ kids (1 Fifth Ave., with the entrance actually on Eighth St.; ☎ 212/995-9559; www.ottopizzeria.com; 8:30am–11:30pm; reservations recommended; R, Q to Eighth St., or A, C, B, D to W. 4th St.), a pizza parlor–cum-wine bar has more of a Greenwich Village vibe, appealing to a well-coiffed crowd of upper-middle-class families and professional singles on the make. Designed to look somewhat like a train station, down to a fake moving sign at the front that lists Italian trains and their times of departure (if you ask, they'll make it spin for you), it's one of the latest in chef Mario Batali's empire—apparently, he created this slightly downscale place so that his kids would have a place to come eat. A couple of the thin-crusted pizzas ($9–$14 per pie) are named after these tykes, and children are treated like royalty here, with coloring maps of Italy and a full spectrum of crayons given to each child on arrival. That being said, this isn't just a kiddie place: Along with such child-friendly items as pizza with red sauce and cheese, the menu features a range of sophisticated, highly authentic Italian dishes such as the *penne con piselli e ricotta* ($9), a startling, minty noodle dish with flavorful al dente peas, or the *lardo* pizza—a pizza doused in delicious, fatty cured-pork fat. There are scrumptious cheese platters ($10 for three, sided by truffled honey, black cherries, and dried peaches); a terrific wine list (with glasses served by the "quartino," so you actually get a glass-and-a-half per order); cured-meat platters ($10); and some of the top gelato in the city.

Chinatown Noshes

Though you can—and should—enjoy a sit-down meal in the neighborhood, there are few more fun (and fattening) ways to spend an afternoon than simply going store to store and grazing on little bites from around the continent of Asia. Not-to-be-missed munchies include:

- **Dumplings:** Head to **Dumpling House** ✯ (118A Eldridge St., off Grand St.; **$**), where a mere $1 buys five delectable pork and chive dumplings. Light at the top, crispy at the bottom, they're much less gummy than standard dumplings because owner Vanessa Duan—the slight lady with the big smile behind the counter—and her staff roll the dough by hand (most dumpling places use a machine) and make a thinner dough than Cantonese chefs do, reflecting the Beijing origin of the recipe used here. Be sure to eat at the back counter so you can sample the house-made vinegar sauce.
- **Malaysian beef jerky:** As soon as you open the door of **Malaysian Beef Jerky Inc.** ✯ (95 A Elizabeth St., off Grand St.; ☎ 212/665-0796; closes at 8pm; **$**), the ambrosial smell hits you: a musky mix of exotic spices and bubbling honey. It sets you up for the jerky itself, which is much more pliant than Americans are used to—quarter-inch slices of either beef, chicken, or pork that are slightly greasy to the touch but tremendously flavorful. A quarter pound, enough for a good-sized snack for three adults, costs between $3.75 and $4.
- **Dried fruits, beans, seafood, and meats:** You don't even have to pay to sample all of the unusual food at **Aji chiban** (37 Mott St.; ☎ 212/233-7650; closes at 6pm; **free**), a member of a Hong Kong–based chain. This dried-stuff store offers a plateful of samples

$$$–$$$$ My splurge choice in the neighborhood would be the walk-in, closet-sized **Tasting Room** ✯✯✯ (72 E. 1st St., just off First Ave.; ☎ 212/358-7831; www.thetastingroom.com; Ⓕ to Second Ave.), where the cramped quarters are offset by the huge flavors of the food, which is gourmet American, creative but satisfying, and served in "tasting portions" that allow everyone at the table to share. It's these tasting sizes that make the place a bit dangerous to the budget. It's nearly impossible to predict how filling a dish will actually be, and if you order too many, the cost of your dinner will go through the roof (the dishes can range from about $9–$16, depending on ingredients and size). My suggestion is to order in stages, conservatively at first, adding more plates if you're not satiated. Wine tastings are also on offer here; the wine cellar in the basement is as large as the restaurant itself, making this a top place for oenophiles. The waiters—a sweet bunch of people who will dispel all those myths about New Yorkers being unfriendly—know the wine list backwards and forwards and can offer superb guidance on vintages.

atop each food-bearing bin in the hope that you'll buy if you enjoy the sample. You can graze a little meal, perhaps starting with an appetizer of barbecued shredded squid, moving on to some different sorts of beef jerky or dried fish (I like the one that's speckled with sesame), and finishing up with a desiccated fruit dessert (the "seedless lover prune" not only has a great name, it's quite tasty). The only one to avoid? I find the ginger a bit too strong, but that's about it; the rest make a great snack.

- **Unusual ice cream:** There is a Häagen Dazs in Chinatown but I have no idea how it stays in business since it is less than a block from the never-empty **Chinatown Ice Cream Factory** ★ (65 Bayard St., between Elizabeth and Mott sts.; ☎ 212/608-4170), a 20-year-old storefront that sells flavors you can't get anywhere else: spicy ginger, lychee with little chunks of the fruit, a potato-like taro, and a surprisingly yummy avocado ice cream. These are their "standards." The flavors they mark as "exotic"? Vanilla and chocolate, of course.
- **Bubble tea:** Definitely an acquired taste, this craze from Hong Kong first came to Chinatown about 5 years ago and has been slowly working its way uptown (there are now tea shops as far up as the West 30s). Very simply, it's a drink that's also a dessert—cold flavored tea in a clear cup with pearls of tapioca that you sip through an extra-wide straw. I personally find the experience of sucking globs of starch through a straw a bit disturbing but many people love it, and the drinks do give you that sugar charge. **Ten Ren Tea** (75 Mott St., or 138 Lafayette St.) and **Saint Alps Teahouse** (51 Mott St., at Bayard St.) are the two big players; both offer a wide selection of flavors.

THE LOWER EAST SIDE

$ Karaoke and comfort are on the menu at **Congee Village** (100 Allen St., between Delancey and Broome sts.; www.sunsungroup.com/congeevillage; Ⓕ to Delancey St., or Ⓙ, Ⓜ, Ⓩ to Essex St.), a veritable multiplex of Chinese porridge. It's a large, three-story restaurant that houses not only two dining rooms (charmingly hokey, with lots of bamboo and fake trees), but a pastel neon bar and a basement of karaoke rooms, all of which are dedicated to the consumption of *congee,* a deceptively simple yet extremely satisfying rice gruel that comes with an assortment of add-in ingredients such as sliced pork, crab, frog meat, and duck. A bubbling ceramic pot, which the smiling waitress will spoon out for you into a smaller bowl if you're male (this courtesy doesn't seem to be extended to female guests . . . or maybe it's just me?), costs between $4 and $5 and can easily satisfy two people. If you want to vary your meal a bit more, you can choose from a large selection of Cantonese dishes.

Tokyo on 10th Street, Nagano on 9th

While the East Village has long been known for its Ukrainian and Indian restaurants, in the last 5 years it's also become a center for Japanese cuisine . . . and not just sushi. On 2 special blocks—9th Street, between Third and Second avenues, and 10th Street, between First and Second avenues—the cafe owners and restaurateurs from Japan cater to a knowledgeable expat crowd with authentic plates and drinks at unique eateries:

- **Decibel** ★ (240 E. 9th St.; ☎ 212/979-2733; 6 to Astor Place; **$**). Grungy, gritty, and hip, this basement sake bar is the polar opposite of Cha An, its serene neighbor to the east (see below). It's where punk Japanese young men and women go, their hair dyed a burnt shade of orange and often sticking straight up. Along with sake, Decibel serves the potato liquor *imo-jochu* (which a friend of mine who lived in Japan insists you can drink by the quart without paying for it the next day) and a full menu of typical Sino bar snacks, from yakitori ($6) to more exotic fare such as lotus roots ($3), pickled squid ($3), and octopus in wasabi sauce ($4).
- **Otafuku** (236 E. 9th St.; ☎ 212/853-3503; 6 to Astor Place; **$**). "Otafuku" is a brown sauce as popular in Japan as Heinz ketchup. It's sloshed over *okonoyake* ($7), the "pizza" of Japanese fast foods—a thick pancake of cabbage, carrots, and ginger in batter stuffed with either squid and shrimp or pork bellies. It's a greasy, sweet treat, and the only place it's fried up in the city (and perhaps the country) is at this teeny storefront where that other Japanese fast food, *takoyaki* ($3–$5)—to put it bluntly, octopus balls—is also on the menu. If you don't want to try these exotic foods (and some will find them a bit much), it's interesting just to stop at the window and watch the counter staff preparing the foods, armed only with toothpicks and a lot of patience (I can't explain the method fully; you'll have to see it for yourself).
- **Soba Ya** ★ (229 E. 9th St.; ☎ 212/533-6966; 6 to Astor Place; **$$**). A strong atmosphere of Zen is set off here by a tinkling fountain at the entrance, and the mood continues through the meal, which for most patrons consists of bowls of house-made soba or udon noodles

$ For dessert in this distinctive area, head 1 block west to Orchard Street and **Il Laboratorio di Gelato** ★★ (95 Orchard St., near Delancey St.; ☎ 212/343-9922; F to Delancey St., or J, M, Z to Essex St.), where John F. Snyder, the founder of Ciao Bella, plays the "mad scientist," whipping up new flavors in the back while his mother (often) serves customers. Double-scoop cups or cones start at $3.50, and are concocted from wacky, fun ingredients. Try the sour-cream gelato, the black sesame, or the (relatively) standard mocha (which tastes as much of

with finely slivered vegetables, and thin but intensely flavored soup or dipping sauce. ***Warning:*** The restaurant will turn away families with young children if none of the booths in the back are empty, as they want to keep the atmosphere serene.

- **Cha An** (230 E. 9th St.; ☎ 212/228-8030; 6 to Astor Place; **$$**). This is the only place in the city, and possibly the U.S., that serves typical tea *kaiseki* or small plate meals. It does this in a setting that looks somewhat like the restaurants that have served monks for centuries next to the temples of Kyoto, down to the small rock gardens at the entrance and the traditional wooden teahouse in the corner. For information on the traditional Japanese tea ceremonies that take place here weekly, see my write-up on p. 194.
- **Shabu Tatsu** ★★ Kids (216 E. 10th St.; ☎ 212/477-2972; 6 to Astor Place; **$$–$$$**). A cook-your-own-meal place, it offers one solid hour of "eatertainment" as you swish paper-thin slices of rib-eye beef, vegetables, and noodles in a vat of boiling water at the center of your table, and then dip them into two contrasting sauces—a tangy soy-vinegar mix and a lush sesame sauce. After you finish your main dish, you're given little bowls for spooning out the "soup" you've created while dipping. The food is simple yet flavorful and the cooking so much fun that even picky children will chow down (though because of the possibility of burns, I wouldn't recommend Shabu Tatsu for kids under 4). An early-bird and night-owl special from 5 to 7pm or 11:30pm to 2am drops the price of a shabu-shabu dinner (salad, main course, rice, and ice cream) to $9.95 per person; regularly, it goes for $17. This is one of the New York locations to which I always bring out-of-town friends.
- **Hasaki** (210 E. 9th St.; ☎ 212/473-3327; 6 to Astor Place; **$$–$$$**). I wanted to include one sushi restaurant in the list, and this long-timer has some of the lowest prices in the city for freshly prepared sushi and sashimi. It also features what most sushi places at this price level don't: a good selection of unusual fish specialties, from toro to tile fish (specials will vary week to week). Come in the summer, when the lovely garden out back opens up.

coffee as of chocolate) if they're on the menu. All in all, Snyder has devised 60 flavors, but only 12 will be on sale at any one time, with flavors rotating on a near-daily basis.

$$ To pair an Italian meal with your gelato, your choice should be the nearby **'inoteca** ★★ (98 Rivington St., on the corner of Ludlow St.; ☎ 212/614-0473; www.inotecanyc.com; reservations recommended; F to Delancey St., or J, M, Z

to Essex St.), which was founded by Jason Denton, a protégé of Mario Batali (who's a partner in this venture). 'inoteca is actually an *enotecca,* an Italian wine bar that pairs the vino with food, as one always should—plates of cheeses, cured meats, hot pressed sandwiches, and salads of all types. I like to come here with a big group of friends so that we can compose an entire cocktail spread for dinner (or lunch) and really make it a party. There are 31 Italian cheeses to choose from (a plate of three costs $11), seven types of meat from speck to prosciutto that's been aged for 18 months ($8–$10), plus such savory large salads as baby rucola with pickled onions and pecorino ($7), or my favorite, a chunky-sweet but citrusy beet salad with oranges, mint, and hazelnuts ($8). All of it is top quality, imported directly from "the Boot," as are many of the regional wines that you won't find anywhere else in the city. Another reason to come with a group: You can reserve a table downstairs in the curved-ceiling wine cellar, a sexy, candle-lit space.

$$–$$$ Foremost among the Lower East Side perennials is **Katz's Delicatessen** ★★ (205 E. Houston St., at the corner of Ludlow St.; ☎ 212/254-2246; www.katzdeli.com; F, V to Second Ave.), one of the city's longest-running success stories, in business since 1888. You may feel a sense of déjà vu as you enter, as this is where Meg Ryan, ahem, made a scene in *When Harry Met Sally,* and it looks just as it did in the flick: a cavernous, loud space with linoleum-topped tables; celebrity photos and testimonials plastering the walls; and curtains of hanging salami in the window. Though its menu is varied and long, only the uninitiated bypass the corned beef sandwich ($12)—the best in the city—a towering stack of meat cured for as long as 30 days, which gives it a richness and depth that you simply don't find with commercially prepared corned beef (which is "pressure injected" to cure in a mere 36 hr.). If you're feeling a bit radical, order your sandwich as a Reuben ($13), and the corned-beef flavor will be enhanced (or overwhelmed, depending on your taste) by melted Swiss and sauerkraut.

$$–$$$ The find of the neighborhood, quite literally, as it's tucked away in a hard-to-find upstairs space that was formerly an art gallery, is **Kuma Inn** ★★★ (113 Ludlow St., 2nd floor; ☎ 212/353-8866; closed Mon, reservations recommended; F to Delancey St.), a stylish little place that serves Thai and Filippino tapas. Created by King Phojanakang, a former protégé of the two big "B"s of the New York cooking scene—David Bouley and Daniel Boulud—the restaurant's menu changes daily, based on what's best at the green market; it usually features the tenderest of grilled octopus, marvelous Thai sausages, and all manner of sprightly vegetable dishes. All are served on "small plates" that range in price from $5 to $13, but the actual size of the servings varies, with some plates big enough for a meal, so I'd recommend ordering conservatively at first and then adding dishes if you find you're still hungry. One of the delights of dining here is meeting Phojanakang, who serves as maitre d'. He's a charming host and endlessly patient with customers agonizing over the extensive sake list and menu. You'll feel like you've been to the house of a good friend when you leave, albeit one who cooks like an angel.

$$$–$$$$ At some point in their lives, nearly every New Yorker makes his or her way to **Sammy's Famous Roumanian Restaurant** ★★★ (157 Chrystie St., at

Delancey St.; ☎ 212/673-0330; dinner only from 4:30pm; reservations recommended; F to Delancey St., B, D, Q to Grand St.), a nightly bar mitzvah masquerading as a steak joint. Set in a basement on the Lower East Side, its decor is gloriously tacky: business cards stuck all over the ceiling, balloons at the tables, and photos of patrons cramming the walls. Completing the ambience is an aged fellow at an electric keyboard who regales the crowd with Yiddish songs, selections from *Fiddler on the Roof,* and the hoariest Jewish jokes you've ever heard. At some point in the evening someone will get up to dance in the aisle, and sometimes members of the crowd take to the microphone to sing as well (especially if they've ordered the house special drink: a bottle of Absolut encased in a block of ice). The crusty, gruff waiters will try to push you into ordering too much food: Resist them. There's no reason whatsoever to order the prix fixe menu ($40), and the steaks are a foot long and overhang the plate, so order one for every two people with just one side of fried potatoes. You have to start with a helping of the chopped liver, a heart attack in a bowl, which the waiter mixes tableside, combining the liver with fried onions, plain onions, and literally a cup and a half of schmaltz (for the uninitiated that's liquefied chicken fat). One order of the liver is enough for four people. Bring a group if you can, as there are few better places in the city for a blowout party.

GREENWICH VILLAGE

Though it's no longer the Bohemian enclave it once was, Greenwich Village is still very much a "village" apart from the rest of the city, and one that takes its rhythms and habits more from Europe than the U.S. Very few big grocery stores are found in this part of town. Instead, residents stroll from the cheese store to the butcher shop to the fresh produce vendor, sniffing, sampling, squeezing fruits, improvising that night's dinner from what's freshest at the various markets (and I'll discuss some of those markets in chapter 11).

The restaurants in the area adopt the same relaxed, sensual approach towards food, and because this is an area primarily of historic townhouses and tree-lined streets, there's ambience galore. The downside to eating in the Village? The prices, which can be high—but we've found a handful of places that give good value for the money.

OFF WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK

$ Peanut Butter & Co. kids (240 Sullivan St., at 3rd St.; ☎ 212/677-3995; www.ilovepeanutbutter.com; closes at 9pm; A, C, E, B, D to W. 4th St.) is the peanut butter–centric restaurant I joked about at the opening of this chapter. Mea culpa! I shouldn't have made fun, because I actually love to dine here and so do my daughters (in fact, we always make sure to pick up a jar of the house-ground peanut butter so we can try to replicate the experience at home). Looking like an 8-year-old's room turned restaurant, with sunshine-yellow walls plastered with old-fashioned ads for peanut butter (who knew that Heinz once made peanut butter?), it's a fun, friendly place with lightning-quick service. My kids go for the classic when they come here—a PB&J, with a choice of raspberry, strawberry, apricot, or grape jelly—and I tend to kick out more, choosing either the "Elvis" ($6.50, the PB, banana, and honey mix that gave the King his, um, regal girth);

the surprisingly right-tasting BLT with PB ($6.50); or the most exotic and satisfying choice on the menu, spicy peanut butter with pineapple jam and grilled chicken ($6.50). There's also "ants on a log" (celery sticks with PB and raisins for $5), chocolate peanut butter offerings, and peanutty desserts, all to be washed down with an icy glass of milk ($1.50).

$ One block west is MacDougal Street, and though this stretch between Washington Square Park and SoHo has to be one of the most touristy areas in the city, it contains a few genuine gems. The famed **Caffe Reggio** (119 MacDougal St.; ☎ 212/475-9557; www.caffereggio.com; A, C, E, B, D to W. 4th St.), for one, has been charming locals and tourists alike for decades. Opened in 1927, it's an antiques-filled haven, with carved dark-wood loveseats and mottled brown walls covered with oil paintings (one from the 16th-century school of Caravaggio), carved relief sculptures, and etchings. The restaurant claims that it first introduced cappuccino to the city, and whether or not that's true, it's the thing to order ($2.75), accompanied by an Italian pastry ($2.75–$4.50). There are also plates of pasta ($5.95) and sandwiches ($4.50), though like most everyone who frequents the cafe, it's never occurred to me to order a meal.

$ For that, I'd go right next door to **Mamoun's Falafel** ★ (119 MacDougal St.; www.mamounsfalafel.com; daily 10am–5am; A, C, E, B, D to W. 4th St.), which serves the best ultracheap falafels in the city at just $2 per sandwich (to decide whether it's the very best would involve a slugfest with fans of the eatery Alfanoose in the Financial District; p. 104). Quarters are extremely cramped, with just three booths for eating along with half a dozen stools, but when the weather is good, you can carry your lunch to nearby Washington Square Park for a messy, delectable picnic. This is also a good late-night snack spot, as it stays open daily until 5am.

$$$ For a more formal meal, stroll 1 block west towards SoHo to **Lupa Osteria Romana** ★★★ (170 Thompson St., near Houston St.; ☎ 212/982-5089; www.lupa.com; reservations recommended; V or F to W. Houston St.), another jewel in the crown of restaurateur/chef Mario Batali, who, to my mind, can cook no wrong. At Lupa especially, the food is bold, gutsy, and exciting, a truly authentic take on the trattoria cuisine of Rome, with flavors and ingredients you won't find anywhere else in the city. The menu changes regularly, based on what's freshest at the market, but if it's offered, try the fresh salt cod, which rides astride a sweet pile of caramelized fennel, slapped with a complementary citrus vinaigrette ($16), or a bowl of puffy ricotta gnocchi sided by chunks of hearty, spicy sausage ($15), or the sea vegetables (basically seaweed) in a rich, fiery red sauce ($6). Also wonderful are the platters of house-cured meats, rich in flavor and cut surgically thin ($10); and the bucatini, a hollow spaghetti in an extravagantly dense sauce of roasted tomatoes, onions, Pecorino Romano, and cured pig jowl. If you want a table, you'll need to make reservations well in advance as it's always jammed, but I prefer to eat at the bar—the bartenders are a delight, friendly, and knowledgeable (if you're game, they'll walk you through a grappa tasting), and the bar stools give you a good vantage point from which to soak in the atmosphere, which is as sophisticated and, yes, as Roman as it gets in the Big Apple.

Greenwich Village & Meat-Packing District Dining

Caffe Reggio **10**
Casa **7**
Corner Bistro **5**
El Faro **3**
Florent **2**
Flor's Kitchen **7**
Lupa **13**
Magnolia Bakery **6**
Mamoun's Falafel **11**
Peanut Butter & Co. **12**
Pearl Oyster Bar **9**
Spice Market **1**
Spotted Pig **4**

WEST OF SIXTH AVENUE, SOUTH OF CHRISTOPHER STREET

$–$$ Flor's Kitchen (170 Waverly Place, between Sixth and Seventh aves.; ☎ 212/229-9926; www.florskitchen.com; 1 to Christopher St.) sits on one of New York's cursed restaurant spots. Before Flor's rented it, this good-sized two-room space was occupied by a series of short-lived eateries—they came, they bankrupted their owners, they left. It's odd actually, because the corner is a very pretty one and great for people-watching, and the space, with its exposed brick walls and large windows, is classic Village. I'm betting that this perky Venezuelan restaurant will fare better because, well, the fare's better (sorry, I couldn't resist), featuring a number of bona fide Andean dishes, from fluffy *arepas* ($4–$5, a sort of extra-thick corn-dough sandwich, with such fillings as black beans, sweet plantains, and perhaps shredded chicken or beef) to comforting *arroz con pollo* ($12) or shredded beef with plantains and beans ($13). Don't pass on the homemade sauces—one a lemony avocado, the other a not-too-hot hot sauce—they raise the dishes to another level and should be applied generously. (Flor's Kitchen has another, much more cramped restaurant at 149 First Ave., between 9th and 10th sts.; ☎ 212/387-8949; 6 to Astor Place, or L to First Ave.)

$–$$ A fixture in both the East and West villages**, A Salt & Battery** (112 Greenwich Ave., between 12th and 13th sts.; ☎ 212/691-2713; 1 to Christopher St.; or 80 Second Ave., between 4th and 5th sts.; ☎ 212/254-6610; 6 to Astor Place; www.asaltandbattery.com) is an authentic Brit fish-and-chips shop, from the accented blokes behind the counter, to the crusty slabs of haddock and cod ($6–$8) and veddy soggy fries, just like in London. Owners Nicky Perry and Patsy Carroll, both from across the pond, have even imported that most absurd of limey desserts, the deep-fried Mars bar. Dipped in the same batter as the fish, it tastes like hot fudge surrounded by a wedge of thinned, almond bubble gum, if that makes any sense, and it's really yummy (though you may feel a bit sick afterwards). As in England, there's counter service only, but the seating area is neat as a pin, and tiled in jaunty maritime blues and greens.

WEST OF SIXTH AVENUE, DOWNTOWN OF CHRISTOPHER STREET

$ For dessert in this part of the Village, you need to go where the crowds are: the sublime **Magnolia Bakery** ★ (401 Bleeker St., at 11th St.; ☎ 212/462-2572; A, C, E to 14th St.), which has become so popular that now-hungry Villagers line up around the block to get in, and there's a maximum (strictly enforced) of 10 cupcakes sold to each customer. It's a tiny, sweet little shop that serves up the best old-fashioned baked goods in the city: rich, creamy icebox cakes, Snickers pie, red velvet cake, and, of course, the famous cupcakes—which have a delightful buttercream frosting, a third of an inch thick and topped with a small flower. There's no place to sit here, but you can squat on one of the nearby stoops (again, you'll be in a charming part of the Village, so this is not a disadvantage).

$$$–$$$$ I may be wrong, but I think that when most Americans think of Brazilian restaurants, they imagine large, bustling *churrascurias,* with waiters theatrically slashing at large slabs of meat and brandishing skewers of roast beef like culinary Zorros.

A British Invasion

"Gastropub"—sounds like some sort of intestinal illness, right? Actually, gastropubs are the latest craze in the U.K., where restaurateurs are taking over pubs and keeping the classic look—lots of dark wood, long bars, fine ales on tap—but serving up pub grub that you don't have to be drunk to enjoy. Now this same formula has hit the States, and its standard bearer is the **Spotted Pig** ★★★ (314 W. 11th St.; ☎ 212/620-0393; www.thespottedpig.com; A, C, E, L to 14th St.; **$$$–$$$$**), run by chef April Littlefield—she's buddies with the "Naked Chef" Jamie Oliver, and cooked previously at famed Chez Panisse and London's The River Club—at the helm. Her food is, quite simply, wondrous. I can't remember another meal when I've emitted so many "Wows!" in the course of an evening. Whether it be the Gnudi appetizer, quite literally a "nude" ravioli, with pasta gone and only ethereally light balls of ricotta left, doused in browned butter and topped with fried sage leaves ($12), or velvety calves' liver married to caramelized onions ($18), or a creamy, nutty Jerusalem artichoke salad ($14), or any of her other innovative offerings—all are awesome.

The downside? The restaurant is too popular for its own good. The Spotted Pig only takes reservations for parties of six and over, so the average wait time for a table is an hour to 90 minutes at dinner. Since this is a pub, nobody leaves while they're waiting for a table; instead, the sexy young things who make up the clientele here crush together, three to the bar, pretending to enjoy their exotic ales (Blue Point Hoptical Illusion, anyone?) as they gasp for oxygen. If you can manage to get here early or late (or better yet, go for lunch), you have a good chance of avoiding the mob scene. But do try and visit if you can; it's an outstanding culinary experience.

Casa ★★ (72 Bedford St., on the corner of Commerce St.; ☎ 212/366-9410; Mon–Sat, dinner only; reservations recommended; 1 to Christopher St.), which specializes in the home cooking of Brazil, is the antithesis of that. A chicly simple white-washed room fronted with floor-to-ceiling windows, it gives just a hint of South America in its decor, with a bunch of bananas hung here, a lace placemat there, a small painting of a colonial church by the bar. But in its food and its effusively gracious service, it's all Brazilian. The typically gorgeous waitstaff (if you've been to Brazil, you'll know how supernaturally good-looking these people can be) are a friendly lot, who will carefully walk you through the menu, leading you to the best of the Brazilian specialties: the meat, fish, and cheese pastry plate, crisp outside and oozing with flavor within, somewhat like the croquettes you get in Amsterdam ($6.95); the wonderfully creamy and chunky seafood stew called *moqueca de frutos dor mar* ($19); and the classic *feijoda,* in which the meats are tenderized for a full 2 days before they hit the plate ($20). Unless you have a big appetite, the main dishes here can easily feed two. Skip dessert, but do indulge in a *caparinha* ($7), a potent sugar-cane-liqueur cocktail that will leave you feeling like you've stumbled into your own Carnaval.

$$$–$$$$ Marble counters go where plywood boards would normally be, and the crowd comes dressed to impress (not to tan), but if you close your eyes, open your mouth, and take a briny bite off the plate in front of you, you'll swear that you are at a clam shack on the coast of Maine. But no, you're at **Pearl Oyster Bar** ★★ (18 Cornelia St., off Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/691-8211; closed Sun, no lunch service Sat; Ⓐ, Ⓔ, Ⓒ, Ⓑ, Ⓓ, Ⓕ, Ⓥ to W. 4th St.), where seafood has that just-off-the-boat freshness, especially the famed lobster roll, an extravagant mountain of shredded meat on a buttered hot dog roll accompanied be a stack of shoestring fries at least 4 inches high. Other fishy faves include the salt-crusted shrimp in a carrot and celery root remoulade, the bacon-larded New England clam chowder, perfect steamers, and fried oysters that explode with juice and flavor. Entrees are market priced but average $22, with appetizers priced from $6 to $10. Though the restaurant recently doubled in size to two rooms (one is counter seating only), it's still pretty small and the no-reservations policy guarantees a line. Still, you'll be standing on a pretty street in the Village, among a chic, sophisticated crowd of diners—not too much of a hardship.

MEAT-PACKING DISTRICT

No, you don't go here for burgers (though there are still meat distributors in the area); this is New York's hottest dance club and bar scene, a tiny district that's become a magnet for hedonists of all types, including gourmands.

$–$$ For the best "drunk dining" in the city, generations of New Yorkers have been weaving their way to **Florent** ★ (69 Gansevoort St., right off Ninth Ave.; ☎ 212/989-5779; Ⓐ, Ⓔ, Ⓒ to 14th St.), a French diner open 24/7 that's the inexpensive haunt of club kids after a long night on the dance floor. You can eat on either side of the midnight divide: breakfast or supper, and both are honest, fresh takes on American and French classics, from an ultra-smooth and rich goat cheese omelet ($6.95), to satisfying *charcuterie* plates ($6.95), to blood sausage (order the huge appetizer portion for $9.95), to mussels and French fries ($13). It's a New York institution that's still going strong.

$$–$$$ Another cheap classic is **El Faro** ★ (823 Greenwich St., at the corner of Horatio St.; closed Mon; Ⓐ to 23rd St.), in business since 1927 (when its now-darkened murals of flamenco dancers were painted) and just 1 block south of the Meat-Packing District. Here you get the most copious tapas in the city, plates that aren't so much "small bites" as huge mouthfuls of garlicky, fresh Spanish fare that you must down with the house's seemingly endless sangria (even the half-pitcher will last longer than you can). The trick here is not to order too much: The paella off the tapas menu ($9.25) comes in a tureen that two people won't be able to polish off; nippingly tart white anchovies in vinaigrette are served eight to the plate ($8); and though they aren't on the menu, you can order six soft, puffy catfish croquettes for just $5. Every two tapas dishes are accompanied by either rice or potatoes: Choose the thinly sliced spuds which taste like warm, well-salted potato chips. If you order wisely, you can easily have an abundant feast here for less than $12 per person.

$$$–$$$$ The ultimate gourmet experience in the neighborhood is Jean Georges Vongerichten's exploration of Asian street foods, aptly named **Spice Market** ✯✯✯ (29 Ninth Ave. at 13th St.; ☎ 212/675-2322; www.jean-georges.com; reservations recommended; A, C, E to 14th St.). I'm not going to lie: It's not a cheap place, but you can do it for a moderate amount of money . . . if you don't get greedy (hard to do here, I know). All of the food is served "family style," meaning that you're supposed to share, so make do with less rather than more (portions tend to be generous). Start with three hearty chicken dumplings called *samosas* ($10) or six perfectly cooked and spiced skewers of pork satay ($11). Then share one of the main dishes, perhaps the crisp monkfish enrobed in a velvety, tangy tamarind glaze ($19); the skate wing with a piquant Asian barbecue sauce ($15); or a pot of the curried duck—rich, brown, delicious ($19). End your meal with the signature dessert: Ovaltine *kulfi* ($9), a log of Indian "ice cream" that is terrifically dense and chocolaty, dusted with fennel seeds and sided by caramel corn. It's astonishingly good. You'll have your meal in the most exotic of settings, a huge, two-story warehouse transformed into an Asian bazaar, with hanging silk lanterns; elaborately carved furniture and wall decorations flown in from India, Burma and Indonesia; and a cadre of model-like servers in saffron robes (with entirely cut-out backs for the women, who look like the sexiest Buddhist monks you've ever seen).

NEW YORK'S FINANCIAL DISTRICT

It's not easy to find a decent, decently priced meal in the Financial District, and I blame the stockbrokers. With shockingly large expense accounts and shockingly little time to actually eat, they have transformed the restaurant landscape here as effectively as imported rabbits munched the Australian outback into a desert. Nowadays, the vast majority of the eateries down here are either greasy, faceless take-out joints (for at-the-desk meals); Irish pubs; or plush, burnished temples of gastronomy more notable for their exorbitant pricing than for their food. It's gotten so bad that one rival NYC guidebook (I won't mention its name) skips the area altogether in its dining chapter.

I won't do that, as this is an important area for tourists, with its many historic sights, Ground Zero, and the ferry terminal to Ellis Island. But because so many visit here during the daylight hours, I have included one choice that's open only for lunch, but is still worth a visit.

$ That daylight-only luncherie is **Sophie's Cuban Cuisine** ✯ (73 New St., between Beaver St. and Exchange Place, right near Battery Park; ☎ 212/808-7755; closed weekends and after 4pm; 4, 5 to Battery Park), a local chain as ubiquitous in lower Manhattan as Bush-blue power ties. Founded by Peruvian immigrant Sofia Lunes (who noticed the number of Caribbean workers in the area and guessed rightly that Cuban food would be popular), these restaurants serve fresh, protein-heavy meals, prepared from scratch each morning and served to a swinging salsa beat. The menu changes daily, with all dishes but one—a shrimp in a startlingly pink garlic sauce ($9)—costing a mere $7 and accompanied by a heaping mound of rice and beans. I favor the *pernil,* a meltingly tender roasted pork accompanied by vinegared onions, though the *ropa vieja* (shredded beef) is darn tasty as well. The *croqueta de Yuca* appetizer is addictive, tasting like fried mashed potatoes wrapped around a tablespoonful of zippy barbecued pork.

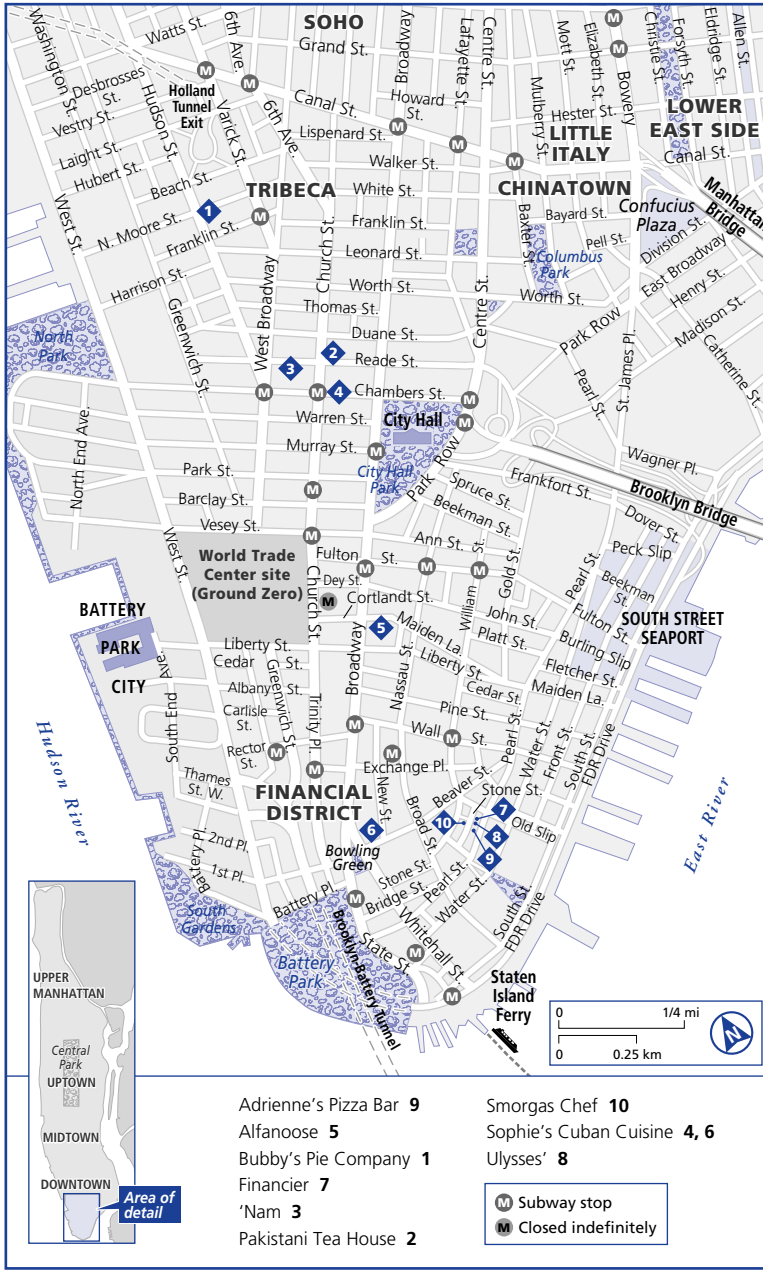
Huge, mayonnaisey Cuban sandwiches are also available for $5 from the take-out counter that occupies about a third of the space in these sparely furnished but always crowded restaurants. Other locations are at 96 Chambers St., between Church Street and Broadway (R, Q to City Hall, or 1, 2, 3 to Chambers St.); and 179 Madison Ave. at 34th St. (6 to 33rd St.).

$ If you're in the vicinity of Ground Zero, the place to stop is **Alfanoose** ★ (8 Maiden Lane, near Broadway just east of Century 21 department store; ☎ 212/528-4669; closed Sun and after 9pm; 1, 9, C, E to World Trade Center). The name means "magic lantern" and if you peer closely at the shelves, scattered here and there are a couple that look like they can be rubbed. They provide the only decoration in this spartan Middle Eastern restaurant, which is jam-packed with local office workers at lunchtime. Most come for the falafel, which is in an orb-to-orb competition with the balls at Mamoun's of Greenwich Village (p. 98) for the title of "Best in the City." Crispy with a supple interior, perfectly spiced and heated—in fact, each is fried to order, which can slow the service—they're lovingly rolled into tidy tahini- and vegetable-spiked sandwiches, and doused with a just-fiery-enough homemade hot sauce ($5). Other Lebanese specialties are equally as good, whether you choose an overflowing platter of moist lamb *schwarma* on a bed of *mojadara* ($12, cracked wheat or rice with lentils and lots of dry-crispy fried onions), or a *shish tawook* sandwich ($7, chicken breast, charcoal grilled). There's no waiter service, but once you get your meal there's always room at one of the six-person tables to hunker down and enjoy.

$ Another low-cost eating option near the World Trade Center site, about 5 blocks uptown to be specific, is **The Pakistani Tea House** (176 Church St., between Duane and Reade sts.; ☎ 212/240-9800; 1, 2, A, C, E to World Trade Center), which serves very little tea but lots of slow-burning curries, freshly baked rounds of nan bread, and tandoori grilled lamb, chicken, and fish. For an overflowing plastic plate of food, consisting of a meat dish and two veggie options with either rice or bread, the price is a low $5. Speaking of veggie options, they're abundant and flavorful, making this a good choice for vegetarians (a similarly copious serving of just-vegetarian fare comes to only $4.49). It's also a good place to catch a cab, as this is where Pakistani drivers come at all hours of the night and day to get a little taste of home.

$–$$ With all there is to see and do in the Financial District, you may not choose to take the time for a sit-down meal. If the urge to picnic hits you, head directly to the New York Stock Exchange. No, they won't let you throw down a gingham blanket on the trading floor (though stranger things have happened there; think of Enron peaking at $90 a share before tumbling to 91¢). Instead, make a beeline for **Daisy May's BBQ cart** ★ (www.daisymaysbbq.com) right outside the New York Stock Exchange (11 Wall St., though you'll find the cart on the Broad Street side of the building). Though the cart's hours are erratic, it usually lingers there for the lunch hour and a bit beyond, peddling straight-from-Carolina pulled pork ($8); tomato-less, heat-packing Texas chili ($6, it uses four different types of chiles in the mix); and, of course, ribs of all kinds. The carts and a mother-ship restaurant located on a barren stretch of 11th Avenue (at 46th St.; ☎ 212/977-1500; go to www.daisymaysbbq.com for more information on where

Financial District & TriBeCa Dining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TRIBECA
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LITTLE ITALY
LOWER EAST SIDE
FINANCIAL DISTRICT
BATTERY PARK CITY
SOUTH STREET SEAPORT
City Hall
City Hall Park
World Trade Center site (Ground Zero)
Holland Tunnel Exit
Bowling Green
Battery Park
South Gardens
North Park
Columbus Park
Confucius Plaza
Staten Island Ferry
Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel
Manhattan Bridge
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History Written in Stone Street

Until 3 years ago, Stone Street was an interesting stop on walking tours of lower Manhattan, an abandoned alley boasting 15 decrepit if beautiful Greek Revival industrial buildings, all built right after the great fire of 1835, off Hanover Square. You went, you saw, you left.

But then, as always happens eventually on this overcrowded island, people realized that space was being wasted—a cardinal sin in Manhattan—and took action. The Landmarks Preservation Commission anointed the area with landmark status in 1995 and poured $2.5 million into repaving what had been the first paved street in New Amsterdam, adding old-fashioned streetlamps. A number of developers also stepped in, and soon it was bustling with cute-as-kittens little restaurants, each of which claimed a spot not only in these historic buildings but right on the cobblestone street, which is closed to traffic to allow for some of the most picturesque al fresco dining in Manhattan (to read more about the history here, go to p. 222 in chapter 8).

- **Smorgas Chef** ★★ (53 Stone St.; ☎ 212/422-3500; www.smorgaschef.com; Ⓡ, Ⓠ to Whitehall St., or ❹, ❺ to Battery Park; **$–$$**) is a sunny yellow and sea-blue Scandinavian restaurant that exposes its customers to all the greatest hits of the region: Norwegian smoked salmon (on top of eggs, chives, and bread, $12), salty herring from Denmark ($8), and, yes, Swedish meatballs as light as beach balls and carrying a nice smattering of lingonberry sauce ($10 on a sandwich, $17 as an entree).
- **Ulysses'** ★ (58 Stone St.; ☎ 212/482-0400; www.ulyssesbarnyc.com; Ⓡ, Ⓠ to Whitehall St., or ❹, ❺ to Battery Park; **$$**), which bills

the carts park) were created by Adam Perry Lang, a protégé of famed chef Daniel Boulud. You'll also find them trolling the Theater District and Midtown East.

TRIBECA, SOHO & NOLITA

Though the wealthiest zip code in the United States (10021) belongs to the Upper East Side, the areas of TriBeCa (the "Triangle below Canal Street"), SoHo ("South of Houston Street"), and to a lesser extent Nolita ("North of Little Italy") are catching up quickly, as these neighborhoods draw more and more celebrities, financiers, and other filthy-rich types. Not surprisingly, the restaurants in these 'hoods can be pretty exalted, not only in decor and ambition, but in price.

SOHO

$–$$ For a quick snack in SoHo, pop by **Hampton Chutney Co.** (68 Prince St., between Crosby and Lafayette sts.; ☎ 212/226-9996; closes 9pm; Ⓠ, Ⓡ to Prince St., ❻ to Spring St.), the Big Apple's version of an Indian "Dosa Hut." The

itself as a Greco-Gaelic pub, if you can imagine that, anchors the street on its north end. More Irish than Greek (though there are tributes to the Greek hero on some of the walls), it's huge but divided adroitly into intimate "snugs" and furnished with several tons of County Clare shale (forming oh-so-Irish country walls in places). What's not-so-Irish about this place is the food, which is much better than I've had in the pubs of Eire, especially the lunchtime carvery, where you can get a heaping plateful of meat and veggies (terrific barbecued spare ribs, juicy roast beef, crispy fries, braised escarole, and more), starting at a reasonable $10. Monday is Lobster Night, featuring $15 dinners and, of course, the Guinness is foamy, icy, and well pulled.

- Also on Stone is a très Parisian dessert place, the patisserie **Financier** ★ (62 Stone St.; ☎ 212/344-5600; closes at 8:30pm; Ⓡ, Ⓞ to Whitehall St., ❹, ❺ to Battery Park; $), which has so-so sandwiches, soups, and salads, but turns out exquisitely creamy, puffy, sweet pastries, and **Adrienne's Pizza Bar** (54 Stone St.; ☎ 212/248-3838; $), a reasonably priced and stylishly appointed parlor where the pies are square, thin-crusted, and well spiced (one can easily feed three people at a cost of $7). The salads tower over the plates ($7 for an entree-sized heap), and such Italian classics as eggplant parmigiana ($7) and lasagna ($8) round out the menu, along with beer and wine. Though eight restaurants are found on the street, the above four offer the best value and food.

quintessential subcontinent munch, *dosas* are sourdough crepes, here made from lentils and rice and folded into sandwiches as long as a 7-year-old's arm. Fillings range from classical Indian *masala* (a curried potato stew for $7.45) to Mediterranean-inspired Kalamata olives cushioned in goat cheese and topped with arugula, diced tomatoes, and roasted onion ($8.95). One dosa should be big enough for all but the hungriest of couples to share.

$$ Another sensibly priced yet exotic choice is **Penang** ★ (109 Spring St., between Greene and Mercer sts.; ☎ 212/273-8883; Ⓡ, Ⓞ to Prince St., or Ⓒ, Ⓔ to Spring St.), a long-standing Malaysian haven on one of the best window-shopping streets in SoHo. The decor is dramatic in the extreme, with bamboo huts, trailing vines, and a rough stone wall at the back; when I'm there I feel like I'm a cast member in *Apocalypse Now—The Musical.* So, yes, it's a bit hokey and, yes, Penang is now part of a nationwide chain. But no one would call the food here inauthentic or dull. It's the opposite, a vibrantly spiced and complex rendition of

traditional Malaysian dishes such as *gadogado* ($5.95, a vegetable salad sheathed in spicy peanut sauce), *sarang burung* ($11, crisply fried taro stuffed with seafood), and beef *redang* ($11, a spicy, coconut-flavored, tremendously tender stew).

$$$–$$$$ A "big splurge" meal in this lovely neighborhood? My choice would be **Balthazar** ★★★ kids (80 Spring St., between Crosby St. and Broadway; ☎ 212/965-1785; www.balthazar.com; reservations recommended; 6 to Prince St., R, O to Spring St.), the best approximation of a French brasserie that you'll find on this side of the Atlantic. Bustling, white-coated waiters? Oui. An Art Nouveau decor with tiled floors, frilly sconces, and red leather banquettes? Oui. Perfectly crisped french fries, mussels swimming in wine sauce, towers of fresh shellfish, correctly bloody steak frites, tender veal stew? Oui, oui, mais oui—Balthazar serves all of this in a setting as beautiful as La Coupole's or Brasserie Lipp's in Paris. At dinner, main dishes tend to hover in the $20 range, but the fare is much less pricey at lunch and breakfast. And the place is so noisy that even the loudest toddler's shrieks will be muffled by the din, so bring the kids—nobody will mind.

NOLITA

$ A speedy but top-quality lunch or dinner can be had at **La Esquina** ★★ (106 Kenmare St., at the corner of Cleveland Place; ☎ 646/613-1333; 6 to Spring St., or N, R, O to Prince), a brushed-steel diner turned taqueria, with a more chic (and expensive) restaurant below, as well as a cafe around the corner. All three serve the complex, vivid food of Mexico City, but you'll spend the least at the taqueria, where the tacos cost just $3 to $3.50 each (though you'll have to down two if you're really hungry). And this ain't Taco Bell! The tacos themselves are floury, soft, and freshly baked; the fillings go beyond the norm, whether you get one with a piquant pineapple *habanero* salsa, the *chiote* rubbed pork, or shredded cabbage with a flaming chipotle salsa.

$$ New York is such an international city that favorite neighborhood hangouts are as likely to feature squid and lemongrass as they are burgers and fries, and such is the case in chic Nolita, where **Lovely Day** ★ (196 Elizabeth St., between Spring and Prince sts.; ☎ 212/925-3310; N, R, O to Prince St.) dishes out Thai and Vietnamese food to a crowd of regulars, who squat on the rough wooden tables outside, dangling babies and calling to tattooed friends as they stroll by. Inside, it's as much of a clubhouse, but a friendly one, with cute little red booths and walls stenciled with cheery flowers. The menu runs the gamut from Asian standards such as summer rolls ($4.80) and pad Thai ($8), to more inventive fare, such as the seared tuna wrapped in crepes and balanced atop a plate of deeply green lettuces and puddles of peanut and wasabi sauces ($13). Accompany your meal with one of the fruity cocktails that fuel the friendly scene here.

$ You'll be tempted to stay for dessert at Lovely Day, but instead I'd recommend taking a short walk down Spring Street to **Rice to Riches** ★★ kids (37 Spring St., between Mott and Mulberry sts.; ☎ 212/274-0008; www.ricetoriches.com; Mon–Thurs 11 am–11pm, Fri and Sat 11am–midnight, Sun 11am–10pm; N, R to Prince St.), a delightful one-trick pony of a dessert place, that serves only rice pudding. This isn't the rice pudding your mom made, however; it's tarted up with all sorts of exotic flavorings and unfortunately cutesy names such as "Sex, drugs

and rocky road" and "Surrender to Mango." I have yet to discover a flavor that wasn't absolutely ambrosial. The shop is also a bit self-consciously chic, with a curved and striped pudding "bar," tables that hang from the ceiling, and oversized and brilliantly colored photos of fruit covering the walls, so I'd suggest taking your puddings to the playground across the street (an especially good idea if you have kids with you—they'll need to run off the overload of sugar these puddings pack). A bowl costs $6, but it should be shared, and if you ask, the staff will allow you to put two flavors into one bowl.

TRIBECA

$–$$ The quintessential TriBeCa restaurant, a place where celebs go for their mac-and-cheese fix, is **Bubbies** ★ kids (120 Hudson St.; ☎ 212/219-0666; also open for breakfast; 1, 9 to Franklin;), a temple of "down-home cookin'," though the menu does careen from jerk chicken wings to quesadillas to matzo ball soup. My advice? Stick with the homey American classics: the crunchy buttermilk fried chicken ($16), the slow-cooked pulled pork ($13), gooey mac and cheese ($11), fluffy sour-cream pancakes ($5.95), perfect omelets ($11), and all of the other breakfast goodies they have on order (weekend brunch is the most popular meal here, and the line for tables can snake down the block). All of these items are top-notch and more in keeping with the space, which looks like a cross between your grandmother's parlor and a roadside diner. Kids will love this place too, not only for the child-friendly menu, but for the endless supply of crayons and paper doled out by the staff, and the bookshelf in the back, brimming with children's books.

$$–$$$ Chic and "Vietnamese restaurant" don't usually appear in the same sentence, except when you're discussing TriBeCa's own **'Nam** (110 Reade St., between Church St. and W. Broadway; ☎ 212/267-1777; A, C to Church St.), an elegant, bamboo-laden eatery with imaginative cocktails and mighty fine rice-paper rolls, noodle dishes, and stews. The one item on the menu that should not be skipped is the *bo luc lac* ($8), a beef-and-watercress salad in an exquisite tamarind vinaigrette. If you go with an entree-sized noodle soup always bobbing with roasted peanuts and an assortment of fish and seafood, expect to pay $11; other entrees range from $12 to $18, making this one of TriBeCa's more affordable eating options.

The Lowdown on Tipping

You must tip in every restaurant you visit, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Waiters in New York make less than minimum wage, just $3.85 per hour, because the government assumes that their income will be supplemented by tips. In fact, it taxes them on the tips they assume they're making, so if you're stingy, they pay for it. It's customary to tip about 15% to 20%, which can be easily calculated by simply doubling the amount of tax on the meal (meal tax in NYC is 8.65%). If your waiter has been particularly attentive, go a bit higher; who knows, you could be helping the next Jennifer Aniston or Kelsey Grammer, both of whom waited tables before they hit it big.

Eating Out with Children in Gotham

Take it from this mom, you don't have to go to stupid theme restaurants (where the tabs will be high and the food execrable) or confine yourself to Mickey D's, just to keep the kids happy. Average New Yorkers take their kids out to dine all the time, and most restaurants will have high chairs, kid-friendly grub, and tolerant waitstaffs. Here are a few that I've found to be extremely easy with babies, toddlers, and tykes:

- **Bubbies:** Gourmet comfort food that everyone will enjoy, plus huge racks of children's books to borrow in the rear. (p. 109)
- **Jacques Imos:** Children eat free at this ragin' Cajun place, conveniently located across the street from the Museum of Natural History. (p. 111)
- **Otto:** An upscale pizzeria with a top-flight wine list, it's loud enough to bring small babies to, and the friendly waitstaff will bend over backwards to keep the older kids amused (a fistful of crayons and a place mat with puzzles on it will also be offered as soon as you sit down). (p. 91)
- **Mama Mexico:** Strolling mariachis and a chef willing to sling chicken nuggets make this Upper West Sider the perfect place for special occasions with the family. (p. 112)
- **Peanut Butter & Co:** Peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches with three choices of jelly, right near some nice Village playgrounds. Need I say more? (p. 97)
- **Sapporo:** Japanese food that's unthreatening (even to picky kids), healthy, fast, and right in the Theater District. (p. 74)
- **Serendipity:** An old-fashioned ice cream parlor and toy store right near Bloomingdales. The "frozen hot chocolate" is legendary. (p. 81)
- **Shabu Tatsu:** Older children will love cooking their own food at this authentic Japanese barbecue and soup joint, where beef is king and the food tasty but simple enough even for kids who usually won't stray beyond hot dogs and grilled cheese. (p. 95)
- **Virgil's Real Barbecue:** Where else in town will your kids be encouraged to eat with their hands? Another excellent Times Square option. (p. 74)

UPPER WEST SIDE

Our 2006 award for "most improved" food neighborhood goes, without the slightest hesitation, to the Upper West Side.

A mere 5 years ago residents had to cross the park or hop a subway downtown to get the authentic ethnic eats and high-quality gourmet fare that folks in other parts of the city take for granted. But with the opening in 2004 of the United States' first "gourmet food court," the Time Warner Center (including the NY version of Napa Valley's French Laundry, here called Per Se and an impossible reservation to

snag) and the similar opening in the 5 or so years prior to that of a handful of excellent Mediterranean, Latin, and French restaurants, the Upper West Side can finally hold its head up in foodie circles. Though it doesn't have the number of really terrific restaurants that, say, the Village does, it's on its way.

$–$$ Though it looks like a Chinese restaurant, **Flor de Mayo** (484 Amsterdam Ave., between 83rd and 84th sts.; ☎ 212/787-3388; 1 to 86th St.) has actually become the city's most outstanding hybrid "Chino-Latino" restaurant. What this means really is a mixed Hispanic and Chinese staff cooking up terrific south-of-the-border fare, and mediocre Chinese food (I don't know why, but that's always the way it is with Chino-Latino). As long as you order off the Latin side of the menu—be it the chopped beef with yellow rice ($8.50), the excellent avocado salad ($3.95), or Dominican chicken with rice ($7.50)—you can't go wrong. Lunch specials lower the cost of a plate with an entree, salad, and rice to just $5.55.

$$–$$$ When the sun rises in the East over Central Park, the Museum of Natural History must cast a long shadow over **Jacques Imos** ★ kids (366 Columbus Ave., at 77th St.; ☎ 212/799-0150; www.jacquesimosnyc.com; closed for lunch; B, C to 77th St., or 1 to 81st St.), an offshoot of the famed Garden District New Orleans joint of the same name, which sits right behind the museum. In my mind's eye, I imagine cocktail-soaked revelers groggily finding their way home through that deep shadow, though this is just a fantasy because the joint closes at a respectable midnight. But it's that kind of place, with ferociously alcoholic mixed drinks (especially the house special Hurricane), a steady stream of 30-something partiers at the bar, and a swampy decor (think fake alligators, bad murals, and hanging tufts of tangled swamp grass). You wouldn't expect the food at this type of joint to be any good, but it is, especially the moist-as-the-Mississippi fried chicken ($17), the shrimp-and-alligator cheesecake ($9.95, a happy mélange of cream, tomatoes, garlic, and lumps of spiced meat and fish), and the classic crawfish étouffée ($19). You also wouldn't expect a place like this to be child-friendly, but it is, exceptionally so in fact: Children eat free here, one per adult, from a menu of nonspicy kiddie foods, making this a top pick for dinner after the dinosaur exhibit across the street.

$$–$$$ My vote for best "date place" in this part of town goes to **Turkuaz** ★★★ (2637 Broadway at 100th St.; ☎ 212/655-9541; www.turkuazrestaurant.com; 1, 2, 3 to 96th St., or 1 to 103rd St.), a gloriously exotic Turkish restaurant, with a look that's pure Arabian Nights. The main dining room is outfitted like a large tent with billowing drapes of fabric all around, twinkling cut-metal lanterns, richly embroidered pillows, and a staff that stands at stiff attention near your table while dressed in traditional Turkish costumes. The food continues the happy mirage with a combination of the well-known Middle Eastern spreads—hummus, puréed smoked eggplant, or red caviar spread (about $5.50 each and all top-notch)—and lesser-known delights such as intricate fingers of salmon wrapped in grape leaves ($17), a sensuously moist lamb kebab slathered in rich yogurt and tomato sauce ($16), or simple but succulent chicken kebabs ($13). If you can, dine here on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday, and start your meal no earlier than

8:30pm so that you'll be in your seat when the free belly-dancing show starts at 10. It's a perfect end—or beginning?—to a sensual evening on the town.

$$$ My fifth west-side choice is **Mama Mexico** ★★ kids (2672 Broadway, off 101st St.; ☎ 212/864-2323; www.mamamexico.com; reservations recommended; 1 to 103rd St.), a happy, loud cantina that's perfect for birthday parties and other special occasions. The large, decoratively tiled room easily absorbs large groups, the margaritas are delicious and stealthily potent, and the presence of strolling mariachi players makes this one of the most festive restaurants in the city. But the real reason I come here is the food, which is bona fide Mexican (a rarity in New York) and truly flavorsome, whether doused with complex mole sauces or dramatically prepared tableside, as the guacamole is, in a performance worthy of a Tony award. Though my children usually won't eat Mexican food, the staff has been able to accommodate them here, even resorting once to chicken nuggets. The menu is several pages long and lists all of the Mexican standards ($10–$16), along with more unusual dishes such as rack of lamb ($25) and red snapper with crabmeat in a pineapple chipotle sauce (delicious and worth it at $22).

$$$ Finally, New York is famous for its steakhouses, but at $35 or more for a hunk of meat, with no side dishes (those are extra and pricey as well), dining at one of these temples of flesh can be a budget breaker. So what's a devoted carnivore to do? Graze at **Pampa** ★★ (768 Amsterdam Ave., between 97th and 98th sts.; ☎ 212/865-2929; closed at lunch; reservations recommended; 1, 2, 3 to 96th St.), an Argentinean restaurant where the most tender of steaks cost just $18 to $22, depending on the cut. No, there's no sawdust on the floor, or grumpy old waiters, or even steak sauce (instead you top the meat with a vinegary, just spicy enough house-made pico-de-gallo sauce), but you do get prime beef in a sensual, candle-lit room or in the tree-shaded garden out back.

THE UPPER EAST SIDE

The Upper East Side has a split personality. Near Central Park it's all old money, high rents, and overpriced restaurants (even the diners in this area cost 20% more than in other parts of the city). Go towards the river, though, and prices drop dramatically as this neighborhood, because it is not well served by subways, has some of the cheaper housing in Manhattan and attracts a number of recent college graduates. The restaurants on York, First, Second, and Third avenues tailor their offerings to meet these penny-pinchers' needs; dine instead on Fifth, Madison, Lexington, or the numbered streets that connect these avenues together, and you'll pay painfully for doing so. Problem is, most of the museums that you'll want to visit are on the more pricey thoroughfares. But I've found two options within a short hop of Museum Mile and a few more that will require a bit more of a hike.

$–$$ For a quick, simple meal, pick **EJ's Luncheonette** (1271 Third Ave., at 73rd St.; ☎ 212/472-0600), a retro-'50s diner that actually stays open well into the night to serve such American classics as grilled cheddar sandwiches ($5.75), burgers ($7.50), and club sandwiches ($7.50). It also has a good collection of tasty oversized salads ($9.50–$12), breakfast items, and soups ($3.95 a bowl).

$–$$ Also inexpensive, healthy, and pleasant is **Le Pain Quotidien** (1336 First Ave., between 72nd and 73rd sts.; ☎ 212/717-4800; www.lepainquotidien.org; closes 8pm; 6 to 77th St.), a nationwide chain of Belgian bakeries that devote a large part of their spaces to rough-hewn wooden tables where full breakfasts, lunches, and early dinners are served. The menu is appropriately bread-centered, with the best of the offerings—sandwiches—served on solid, nutty brown breads or baguettes, topped with lots of vegetables and sided by salads. Full salads are also available, as are breakfast plates, tarts, and pies galore, and big bowls of café au lait. An average meal here will cost less than $12. Along with the First Avenue location, Le Pain Quotidien has branches in SoHo, Greenwich Village, and the Upper West Side, and near Carnegie Hall.

$$–$$$ Your best option for reasonable eats on Museum Mile is **Café Sabarsky** ★ (1048 Fifth Ave., entrance on 86th St.; ☎ 212/628-6200; www.neuegallery.org; closes 9pm; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.), which in any other part of town would not be considered reasonably priced in the slightest. But for a seat in a wood-paneled mansion designed by Carrere and Hastings (architects of the New York Public Library at 42nd St.), overlooking Central Park, paying $11 for a sandwich can't be matched. Part of the Neue Gallery, a museum of Austrian and German art (p. 163), the transplanted Viennese cafe serves all the heavy Teutonic specialties of that city: bratwurst ($13), liverwurst sandwiches ($11), and spatzle with vegetables ($15), along with an assortment of lighter salads and sandwiches. These are all fine, but you really come here for the delicious pastries and Viennese coffee so strong it will grow hair on your tongue. The cafe hosts classical performances on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons and Friday evenings, which you can attend for the cost of a strudel ($7).

$$$ The East Side does have a Southwestern choice for a midprice meal in a fun setting. In New Mexico, a place like **Canyon Road** ★ (1470 First Ave., between 76th and 77th sts.; ☎ 212/734-1600; reservations recommended; 6 to 77th St.), with its Tex-Mex menu, faux adobe interior, and potent margaritas, would be as common as cowboy boots and cacti. But though New York does French food better than Parisians, and features Italian food as authentic as any Italian mama's, good fajitas, enchiladas, and burritos are hard to come by; it's even rarer to find a place that does these dishes creatively (try the duck burrito covered with a pleasingly sweet mole sauce, made with cinnamon instead of chocolate, $15). While I can't say whether the food here equals what's served in the restaurants along Santa Fe's real Canyon Road, for New York City this is about as good as it gets.

$$$–$$$$ Not far from the Cooper Hewitt museum, **Table d'Hote** ★ (44 E. 92nd St., off Madison Ave.; ☎ 212/348-8125; reservations recommended; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.) has a full range of "tasting" options and early evening prix fixes that keep the prices within the realm of reason. The prix fixe is $20 before 7pm and includes three courses. And for almost every entree on the menu, there are half-portions, which I find to be quite filling, the meat a little larger than the size of a pack of cards (which is, after all, the size recommended by most nutritionists), and the rest of the plate is as well stocked with veggies as the full portion. The cuisine here is sophisticated French and quite well done, with such options

Upper West Side, Upper East Side & Harlem Dining

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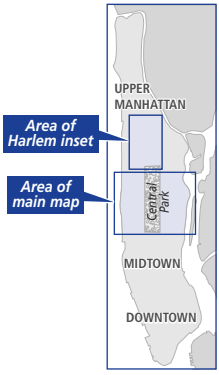
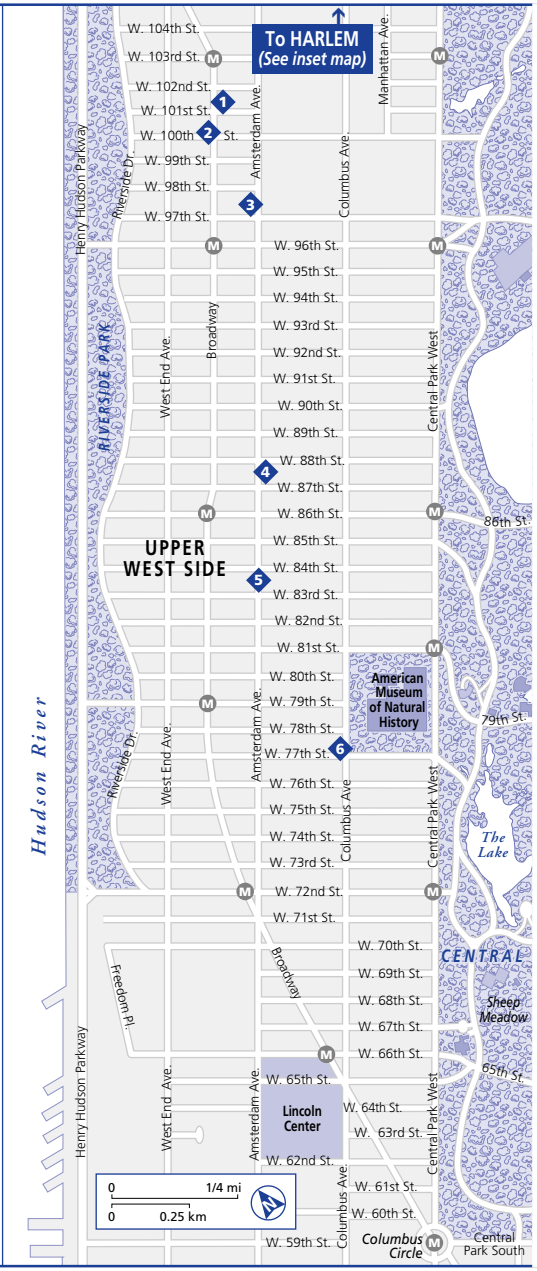
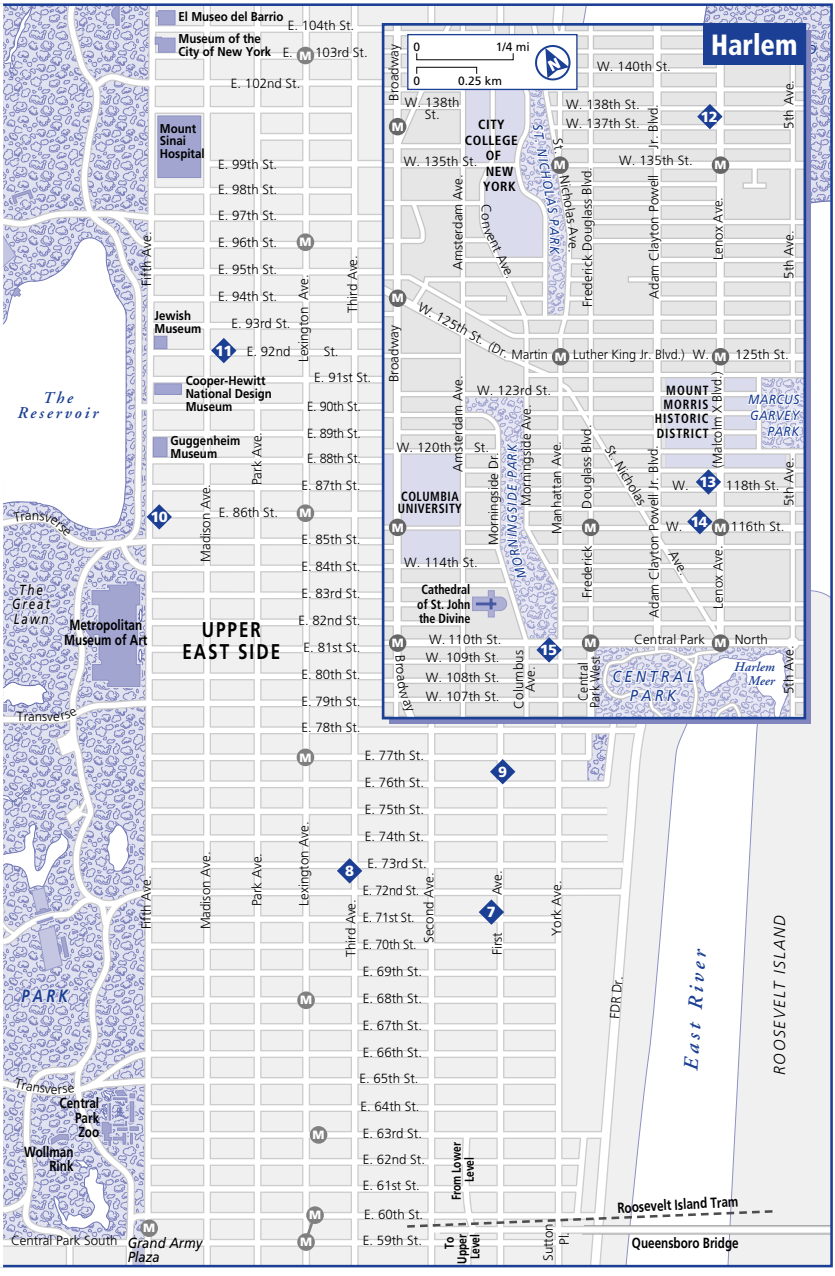
- Canyon Road **9**
- EJ's Luncheonette **8**
- Flor de Mayo **5**
- Jacques Imos **6**
- Mamma Mexico **1**
- Miss Mamie's Spoonbread Too **12**
- Miss Maude's Spoonbread Too **15**
- Native **13**
- Pain Quotidien **7**
- Pampa **2**
- Quintessence **3**
- Table d'Hote **11**

Ⓜ Subway stop






Harlem
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Museum of the City of New York
Mount Sinai Hospital
Jewish Museum
Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum
Guggenheim Museum
The Reservoir
The Great Lawn
Metropolitan Museum of Art
UPPER EAST SIDE
CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Cathedral of St. John the Divine
MOUNT MORRIS HISTORIC DISTRICT
MARCUS GARVEY PARK
ST. NICHOLAS PARK
MORNINGSIDE PARK
CENTRAL PARK
Harlem Meer
Central Park North
Central Park West
Columbus Ave.
Broadway
Amsterdam Ave.
Convent Ave.
St. Nicholas Ave.
Frederick Douglass Blvd.
Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.
Lenox Ave.
Fifth Ave.
Third Ave.
Lexington Ave.
Park Ave.
Madison Ave.
Second Ave.
First Ave.
York Ave.
Morningside Dr.
Manhattan Ave.
St. Nicholas Ave.
Malcolm X Blvd.
Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Transverse
PARK
Central Park Zoo
Wollman Rink
Central Park South
Grand Army Plaza
East River
ROOSEVELT ISLAND
FDR Dr.
Roosevelt Island Tram
Queensboro Bridge
Sutton Pl.
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To Upper Level
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Getting a Raw Deal

Anyone who's ever seen one of the films created by followers of the Dogma movement in Scandinavia (which eschewed all of the technological trickery that is routinely used in films today) knows that sometimes by limiting the palette of options, moments of genius can occur. **Quintessence** ★★★ (566 Amsterdam Ave., between 87th and 88th sts.; ☎ 212/501-9700; 1, B, C to 86th St.; **$$–$$$**) is the culinary equivalent of that cinematic movement, a restaurant that eliminates most of the methods and ingredients those in the culinary world hold dear. Here, all of the food is organic and plant-based (no fish, meat, dairy, or eggs, thank you very much), none of it has been processed outside of the restaurant (which eliminates wheat and sugar from the menu), and most importantly, no food has been heated above 118°F, which the staff believes kills important live enzymes. Remarkably, what emerges from these strictures is a globe-hopping cuisine that's as toothsome as it is healthy. No, you won't be reduced to eating salads; the menu hops from creamy, intensely tomatoed pizzas ($10) to Mexican tamales ($15) to authentic-tasting Indian curry ($16). Where rice is called for, the chefs substitute wild rice (actually a grass) that they tenderize by soaking it for 12 hours; breads are re-created with shaved coconuts, seeds, and nuts; and pie crusts are a tasty mélange of soaked pecans, coconut flakes, and apricots. The food is deeply satisfying, in some instances quite spicy, and has a ventriloquist's talent for correct flavors, though it's usually chewier than you'd find with more traditional ingredients.

Quintessence also has an outpost in the East Village (263 E. 10th St., between First Ave. and Ave. A; ☎ 646/654-1823; L to First Ave.), and both locales are simple but elegant, with wheatgrass-colored walls, appropriately enough, hung with the paintings of local artists.

as a rich roasted quail with rosemary stuffing ($15 half-portion), hangar steak sided by Stilton potatoes ($15 half-portion), and a lovely salad of goat cheese fritters and beets ($11). ***Note:*** The place is tiny; in fact it looks a bit like a little cottage in Provence, with all-white wooden walls and flowered banquettes, so you should make reservations, as it does fill up fast.

HARLEM

$$–$$$ For dining up in Harlem, Sylvia's is an institution. Problem is, it's been around so long that the food has become rather institutional, and today it's tourists on escorted tours (in my experience) who primarily go there. Instead you'll want to visit some of the new ladies of Harlem: **Miss Maude's Spoonbread Too** ★★ (547 Lenox Ave., near 137th St.; Mon–Sat noon–10pm, Sun 11am–9:30pm; **$$–$$$**), **Miss Mamie's Spoonbread Too** ★★ (366 W. 110th St., between Columbus and Manhattan aves.; ☎ 212/865-6744; hours same as above;

$$–$$$), and **Amy Ruth's** ★★ (113 W. 116th St.; ☎ 212/280-8779; http://amyruthsrestaurant.com; **$$–$$$**). The first two, as you might have guessed, are sister restaurants, actually named for owner Norma Jean Darden's mother and aunt, who passed down to Darden the recipes featured on the menu. They feel like family affairs as well, with old black-and-white photographs of relatives staring down at you from the walls, and homey touches, such as paper butterflies hanging from the lights at Miss Maude's and yellow wainscoting at Miss Mamie's. The food continues the theme, with many recipes that could be served up at a family reunion: exceedingly tender BBQ ribs ($14), big slabs of slightly spicy corn bread, greaseless fried chicken and shrimp ($12 and $15), and delectable smothered pork chops ($15). The only missteps here occur when you leave the South—the jerk chicken is numbingly spicy. Other than that, the food is first rate. By the way, if Darden's name sounds familiar, it's because she penned, along with her sister, the best-selling cookbook "Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine."

Amy Ruth's was named for the grandmother of owner Carl Redding, and he'll readily admit that it's her recipes that he uses in the dining room. But part of what makes the food so good here is the freshness of the ingredients: very green veggies, perfect sweet potatoes, and the honey for the honey-fried chicken that comes from beehives on the roof. You'll also enjoy dining here if you know anything about New York politics, as this is the unofficial clubhouse, along with the

The Great New York Bagel Debate

A handful of glutinous wheat mixed with a bit of malt and rolled into a circle that is boiled and then baked—that's the simple recipe behind New York's edible mascot, the bagel. You wouldn't think something as basic, as simple as this little bit of circular bread would inspire so many heated debates, such rapturous praise, but in Empire City, the bagel is king, so you should try one sometime during your visit (just don't ask to have it "scooped out," the sacrilegious craze among carbphobics today). The best places to try them (all of them modest in price), where you're likely to get them fresh out of the oven, are:

- **Absolute Bagels** (2788 Broadway, at 107th St.; ☎ 212/932-2052; 1 to 110th St.)
- **Bagel Bobs** (51 University Place, between 10th and 11th sts.; ☎ 212/533-2627; 6 to Astor, R, O to 8th St.)
- **H&H Bagels** (2239 Broadway, between 80th St.; ☎ 212/595-8000; 1 to 79th St.; or 1551 Second Ave., between 81st and 82nd sts.; 6 to 86th St.)
- **Murray's Bagels** (500 Sixth Ave., at 13th St.; ☎ 212/462-2830; E, F to 14th St.; or 242 Eighth Ave., between 22nd and 23rd sts.; E, C to 23rd St.)
- **Kosars** (367 Grand St., between Essex and Norfolk sts.; ☎ 877/4-BIALYS; F to Delancey St.)

Abyssinian Baptist Church, for Harlem's political elite, many of whom have dishes named for them on the menu. It's not unusual to see Congressman Charles Rangel when you're eating the tasty meatloaf platter named for him, or Al Sharpton when you're munching on "his" waffles and chicken platter (the best in the city). Prices are equivalent to what you'd find at Miss Mamie's.

$$–$$$ If you want to get off the soul food train, **Native** ★★★ (161 Lenox Ave., at 118th St.; ☎ 212/665-2525; www.harlemnative.com; reservations recommended; ❷, ❸ to 116th St.) is Harlem's most inventive eatery. It slams together the cuisines of Morocco, France, the Caribbean, and Louisiana for some of the most stunning, original food in the city. Sometimes all four traditions will be married on one plate, as with the pecan-crusted catfish ($14) with a side of Southern cheddar grits, a very French lemon-cream sauce, a hint of Moroccan spice in the fish, and Caribbean sautéed greens. More often, you'll have to choose where you want your taste buds to travel, either to New Orleans for a perfect plate of red beans and rice ($10), to the Caribbean for a savory basil chicken curry ($11), or to Africa for the moist, crisp Moroccan fried chicken with walnut sauce ($12). You wash all this down with excellent sangria or cocktails in a room that is also a fusion of moods, with large works of African art, diaphanous white curtains draped across the front picture window, and jungle plants poking from the corners. Absolutely worth the trek uptown.

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Average entree price: $=up to $10; $$=$11–$16; $$$=$17–$25; $$$$=Over $25.

5 Remarkable Sights & Attractions

Let's rank the ones you definitely must see

ASK NEW YORKERS ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS FOR THEIR CITY, AND THEY WILL often respond, "There's just one New York." By that they mean: one city so full of museums (more than 40 major ones); historical sites; world-famous institutions; parks; zoos; universities; lectures; concerts and recitals; theaters for opera, musicals, drama, and dance; architectural highlights; presidents' homes; and kooky galleries, that its diversions are limitless and you can never be bored. If you had the speed and stamina of a Lance Armstrong, you would still be hard put to cover all of the attractions in several months of touring.

Because your own time is more limited than that, I'm confining my coverage to two categories of sights in this chapter:

First up are the city's "iconic" attractions, the places universally associated with Gotham—the headliners that make the city so massively popular. These include the major museums (the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim, just to name two), the great historical and architectural sites (including Ellis Island and the Brooklyn Bridge), and, in a category all its own, New York's most sobering site: the vast graveyard that was once the World Trade Center.

Next are the less famous, secondary attractions that, if they were magically transported to almost any other city in America, would instantly become that city's top cultural draw and bring it acclaim, prestige, and millions of dollars in tourist revenue (no, I do not exaggerate). These attractions—such as the Tenement Museum, the Museum of the Moving Image, the American Museum of Folk Art, The Frick Collection—while lesser known, can add immensely to a New York City visit. And therefore it's important occasionally to step off the usual tourist treadmill (Empire State/Times Square/Statue of Liberty) and try one of the so-called secondary sights.

> *"Other cities consume culture. New York creates it."*
>
> —Paul Goldberger, *The City Observed*

See chapters 7 through 10 for my insights on New York's outdoor spaces, the vital New York theater scene, the city's nightlife, and historic walks.

Finally, please don't forget to page through chapter 6, "The Other New York," for sights and activities that should help you get "under the skin" of the city, allowing you to actually meet New Yorkers and see how they work, play, and learn. From trivia contests at local pubs to tango lessons at the

Argentinean Embassy, from erudite lectures by world leaders to nights of bawdy excess at the city's Russian nightclubs, these are the types of experiences you'll find in that chapter to help give your vacation depth and flair.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME

If you have just 1 day in New York: You have my condolences. First thing you're going to want to do is slam your shoe into your fanny for giving yourself far too little time to experience the city. Then go directly to the Ferry Terminal at Battery Park City (try to get there at 9am to avoid the crowds) and spend 2 to 3 hours touring **Ellis Island** (p. 134). You'll see the Statue of Liberty from the ferry, but with only 1 day, you have no time to tour it. From the ferry terminal, walk north to **Ground Zero** (p. 135) to pay your respects. Then head over to **Chinatown** (p. 12) for lunch. From Chinatown, catch a subway up to the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (p. 140), where you should spend the remainder of the afternoon. Head next across the park to the Upper West Side for dinner, and after dinner down to **Times Square** (p. 136) to see the lights and take in a show (with just 1 day in town, you'd be wise to book your tickets in advance; go to chapter 10 to learn how to do so at a discount). If you have the stamina, head over to the **Empire State Building** (p. 125)—open until midnight—for a fond farewell to the city, which will be glittering and throbbing with a million tiny lights after dark.

If you have 2 days: You can slow down . . . a little. Start the day as you would have if you had only 1 day, with a ferry trip to Ellis Island. This time, however, hop off at Liberty Island to tour the small museum and base of the **Statue of Liberty** (p. 133) before going on to the **Immigration Museum at Ellis Island.** This will require 3 to 4 hours, so take the subway directly up to **Chinatown** for a late lunch, then double back to Ground Zero. From there, head to Midtown for an afternoon visit to the **Museum of Modern Art** (p. 143). Alternatively, you can spend the afternoon on **Fifth Avenue** (p. 251) between 56th and 48th streets, window-shopping and taking in **St. Patrick's Cathedral** (p. 200) and **Rockefeller Center** (p. 138). About an hour and a half before sunset, head over to the **Empire State Building** to see the city at twilight, and catch the moment when thousands of lights spark to life (a thrilling sight). End your evening with dinner down in the **Village** (East or West, your choice), and if you're really ambitious, pop over to a music, dance, or comedy club (see chapter 9 for info on the city's evening entertainment) before collapsing into bed.

Day Two should begin at the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (which opens at 9am; p. 140) for a morning of culture; if there's a recorded tour with commentary by the suave and erudite Philippe de Montebello (director of the museum) take it, or take one of the guided tours. Then stroll across Central Park, following one of the narrow winding paths (there are many) until you find yourself on the Upper West Side, where you should have lunch. Spend the rest of your afternoon at the **American Museum of Natural History** (p. 142) and **Rose Center for Earth and Space** (p. 143). After all of your museum-hopping, treat yourself to a nice dinner near the museum or in Midtown, and then take in a **Broadway** or **Off-Broadway show.**

If you have 3 days: You now have time to breathe both in and out. You'll also have time to divide the city into efficiently visited areas. Spend Day One downtown,

taking in the **Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island,** and **Ground Zero,** and visiting **Chinatown** for lunch. Then take a **walking tour of the Financial District** (p. 217), which begins in Lower Manhattan, or visit the **Tenement Museum** (p. 159), the **Museum of Jewish Heritage** (p. 158), or the **NY Police Museum** (p. 155). If you have the time, walk across the **Brooklyn Bridge** (p. 139). Dine in SoHo, Greenwich Village, the East Village, or the Lower East Side.

Day Two can be devoted to Midtown. Start your day at the **Museum of Modern Art** (p. 143), have lunch there, and then either take a stroll on **Fifth Avenue,** visiting **Rockefeller Center** or **St. Patrick's Cathedral,** or simply window-shopping. Or spend the afternoon at either the **Museum of American Folk Art** (p. 154) or the **Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum** (p. 154). An hour before sunset, make your way to the **Empire State Building** so you can take in the views at dusk. Eat downtown (if you have time; the food is so much better in this area) or in the Theater District, and take in a show.

Day Three will be your Uptown day: The **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (p. 140) should occupy your morning, and you can eat lunch there or at a nearby restaurant. If it's a nice day, you may want to spend the afternoon exploring **Central Park** (p. 205). Alternatively, make it a full museum day by visiting either the **Guggenheim** (p. 145), the **Frick** (p. 147), the **Whitney Museum** (p. 150), or the **American Museum of Natural History.**

If you have 4 or more days: Follow our itinerary for the 3-day visit and work in the sights you have missed on the other days. You may wish to devote 1 day to exploring an outer borough: Perhaps make a pilgrimage to the **Brooklyn Museum** (p. 161) and **Botanical Gardens** (p. 211) or, alternatively, take an outing to the **PS 1 Contemporary Art Center** (p. 170) and the **Museum of the Moving Image** (p. 160) in Queens. Take in a few shows, a jazz concert, a dance club, or a famous lounge. For ideas on more idiosyncratic ways to spend your time, scan chapter 6, "The Other New York."

NEW YORK'S 12 ICONIC SIGHTS

Of all the sights of New York, an even dozen are must-sees:

KONG'S-EYE VIEW: There's no better introduction to New York than a visit to the **Empire State Building** ★★★ (350 Fifth Ave., at 34th St.; ☎ 212/736-3100; www.esbnyc.com; $16 adults, $15 seniors and kids 12–17, $11 under 12, free to military in uniform; daily 9am–midnight; B, D, F, N, R to 34th St.). The apex of the New York skyline, both literally (at 102 stories and 4,563 ft.) and figuratively, the view from its Observation Deck is at once instructive and exhilarating. From your bird's-eye perch, you orient yourself geographically and see, with a clarity not possible on the ground, the miracle of Manhattan, that runt of an island that couldn't get much wider or longer, and so did what no other city before it had done and expanded to the skies, becoming a dense, pulsating city of boxy stalactite-like towers set on a painfully narrow strip of land.

Look first to the south, where the Financial District's powerful skyscrapers loom over the field of lower, mostly residential housing that stands between it and Midtown. Beyond the Financial District, in the harbor, are the Statue of Liberty

to the right and the Brooklyn Bridge (the most graceful of the three bridges you'll see in this direction). Right below you will be the triangular Flatiron building, one of the most thrillingly odd in Manhattan (it was Frank Lloyd Wright's favorite building), wedged between Broadway and Fifth Avenue at the point where they form an "X," and looking, as many have said, like the prow of a ship. Just to the side of it are the glittering gold roof of the Metropolitan Life Tower and the World Life Insurance Towers, once centers of New York's high society and now just part of the landscape. Drift to the north side of the building and you will be among a riot of skyscrapers, thrown up in a manner that seems wildly chaotic from this vantage point. This strip of Midtown contains more office space per acre than any other area in the world. Peer through the curtain of buildings to catch a glimpse of Central Park, looking like a modest lawn from this great height. To your right, take a good look at the shining, scalloped spire that is the top of the Chrysler Building (many have said that it was designed to look like the grillwork of 1930s-era Chrysler cars). If you dare, stick your head through one of the large holes in the suicide prevention fence to gaze at the ever-moving current of yellow cabs below.

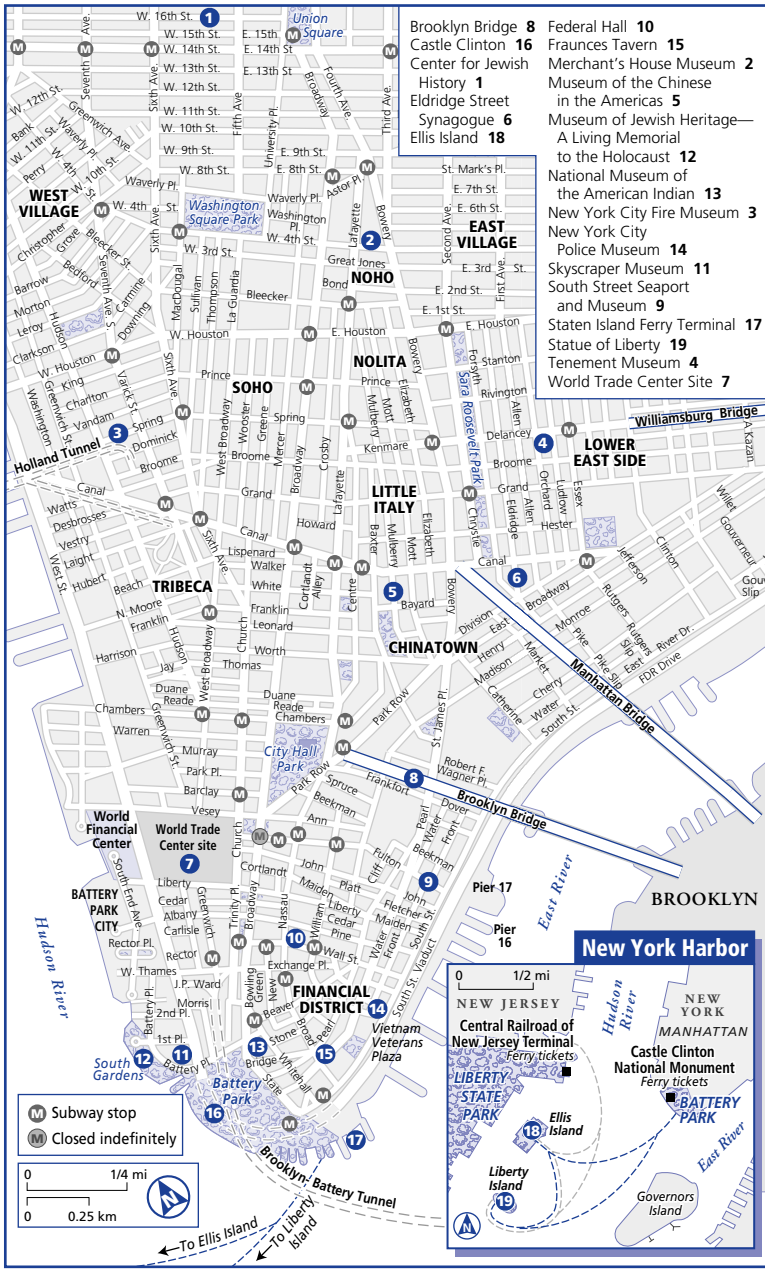
The Empire State Building keeps longer hours than any other tourist attraction in the city, opening at 9am and closing at midnight to accommodate the close-to-four-million visitors who troop through yearly. As you may have heard, the lines here can be epic. In fact, you'll have stood in four separate lines before you reach your goal of the 86th-floor Observation Deck (the space on the 102nd floor has been closed since 9/11, though it may reopen after this book goes to press). On very crowded days, this can take up to 2½ hours. Some ways to "game the line" include:

- Arrive promptly at 9am or during the dinner hour, which are relatively uncrowded times.
- Plan to visit on a Tuesday or Wednesday, the least popular days of the week. You'll encounter the biggest crowds on Saturday and Sunday, followed closely by Monday and Friday.
- Bite the bullet and buy an "Express Ticket" (pricey, but possibly worth it at $35), which will allow you to jump to the head of all of the lines and get to the top in 20 minutes flat.
- Purchase and print out a ticket from the Empire State Building website, which will allow you to skip the ticket line (though *not* the lines for security or the elevators). Purchase of the **City Pass** (p. 144) brings the same perks. The **New York Pass** is not quite as good a deal, because you'll have to wait in the ticket line to change your voucher into a ticket.

Note: The Empire State Building is in the midst of a vast renovation as I write this, and by late 2006 the staff here hopes to have an interactive museum set up alongside the line, which hopefully will make that part of the experience less bothersome.

WE ARE THE WORLD: Make your way along 42nd Street towards the East River, where you'll find the 7-block stretch of international territory that makes New York City the capital of the world. Step through the visitors entrance gate and you will be leaving the United States behind and entering the **United Nations** ★★★ (First Ave., at 46th St.; ☎ 212/963-8687; www.un.org/tours; tours $12 adults, $8.50 seniors,

Downtown Manhattan Attractions


Brooklyn Bridge 8
Castle Clinton 16
Center for Jewish History 1
Eldridge Street Synagogue 6
Ellis Island 18
Federal Hall 10
Fraunces Tavern 15
Merchant's House Museum 2
Museum of the Chinese in the Americas 5
Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust 12
National Museum of the American Indian 13
New York City Fire Museum 3
New York City Police Museum 14
Skyscraper Museum 11
South Street Seaport and Museum 9
Staten Island Ferry Terminal 17
Statue of Liberty 19
Tenement Museum 4
World Trade Center Site 7
WEST VILLAGE
EAST VILLAGE
NOHO
SOHO
NOLITA
LITTLE ITALY
LOWER EAST SIDE
TRIBECA
CHINATOWN
FINANCIAL DISTRICT
BATTERY PARK CITY
BROOKLYN
Union Square
Washington Square Park
City Hall Park
Battery Park
South Gardens
World Financial Center
World Trade Center site
Vietnam Veterans Plaza
Pier 17
Pier 16
Holland Tunnel
Brooklyn Bridge
Manhattan Bridge
Williamsburg Bridge
Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel
Hudson River
East River
Sara Roosevelt Park
Park Row
Broadway
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Park Pl.
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Forsyth
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St. James Pl.
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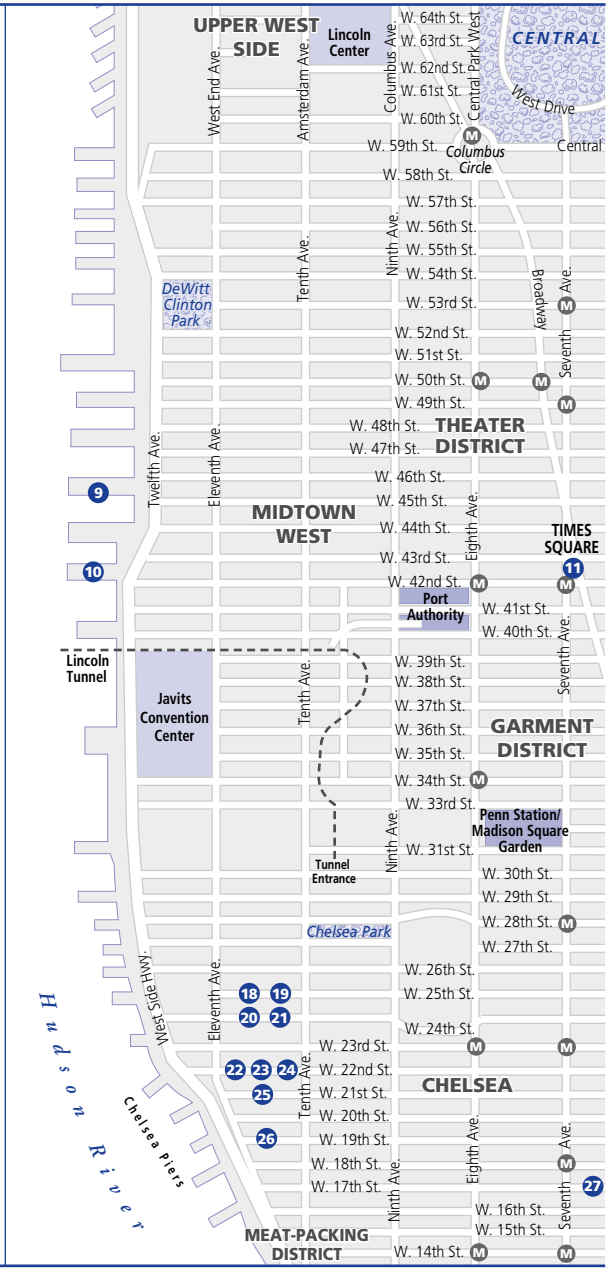
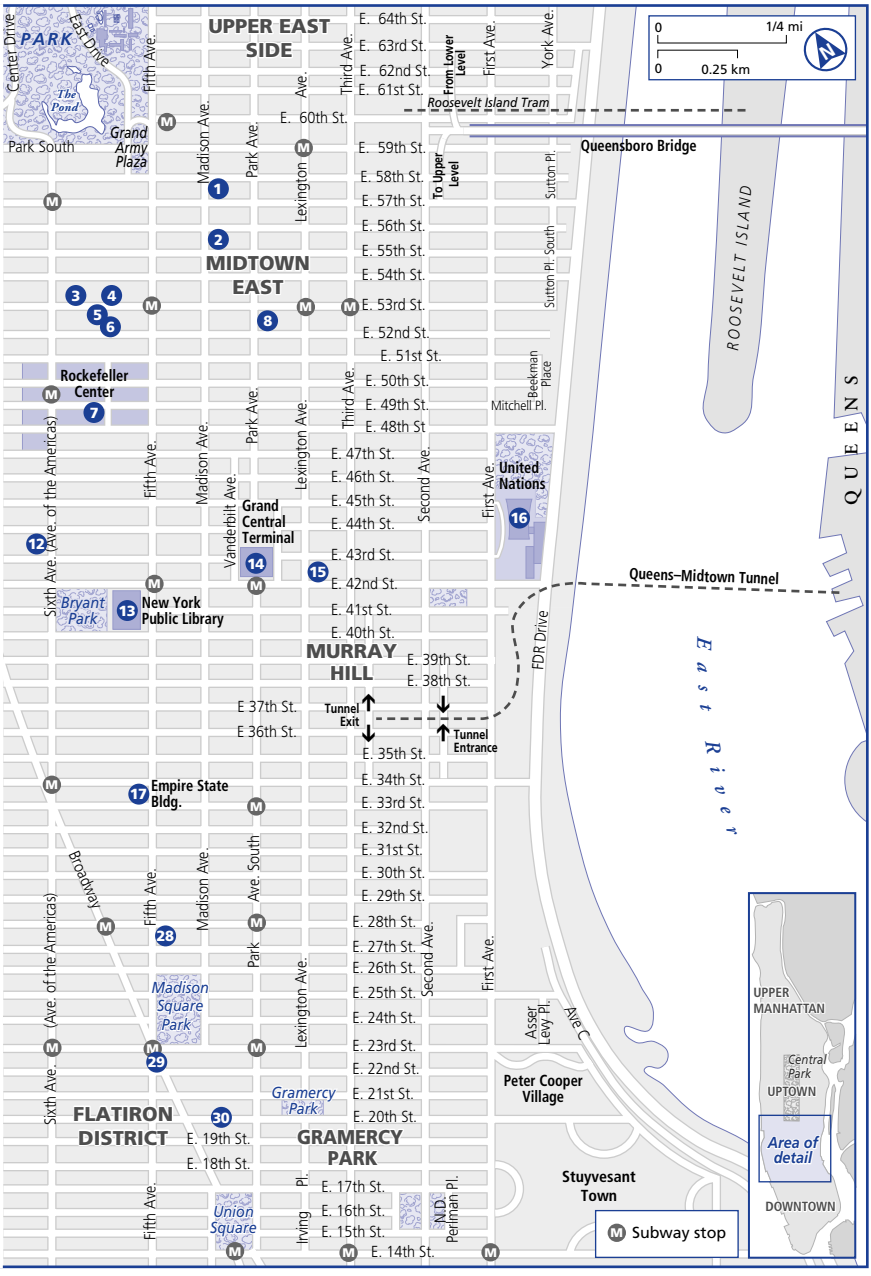
Bowery
Lafayette
Broadway
Crosby
Greene
Wooster
West Broadway
Mercer
Broome
Spring
Prince
Soho
Nolita
Noho
Bleecker
Houston

Midtown Manhattan Attractions

303 Gallery **22**
American Folk Art Museum **3**
Andrea Rosen Gallery **21**
Barbara Gladstone Gallery **20**
Chrysler Building **15**
Circle Line Sightseeing **10**
Dahesh Museum **1**
David Zwirner Gallery **26**
Empire State Building **17**
Flatiron Building **29**
Grand Central Terminal **14**
International Center of Photography **12**
Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum **9**
Museum of Modern Art **4**
Museum of Arts and Design **5**
Museum of Sex **28**
Museum of Television and Radio **6**
New York Public Library **13**
Pace Wildstein Gallery **19**
Paula Cooper Gallery **25**
Rockefeller Center/ Top of the Rock **7**
Rubin Museum **27**
Seagrams Building **8**
Sonnabend Gallery **24**
Sony Wonder Lab **2**
The Proposition **23**
Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace **30**
Times Square **11**
United Nations **16**
Yossi Milo Gallery **18**




PARK
Center Drive
East Drive
The Pond
Grand Army Plaza
Park South
UPPER EAST SIDE
MIDTOWN EAST
Rockefeller Center
Grand Central Terminal
Bryant Park
New York Public Library
MURRAY HILL
Empire State Bldg.
Madison Square Park
FLATIRON DISTRICT
Gramercy Park
GRAMERCY PARK
Union Square
Irving Pl.
N.D. Perlman Pl.
Stuyvesant Town
Peter Cooper Village
Asser Levy Pl.
Ave. C
United Nations
Beekman Place
Mitchell Pl.
Sutton Pl.
Sutton Pl. South
York Ave.
First Ave.
Second Ave.
Third Ave.
Lexington Ave.
Park Ave.
Madison Ave.
Fifth Ave.
Sixth Ave. (Ave. of the Americas)
Broadway
Park Ave. South
Vanderbilt Ave.
FDR Drive
East River
ROOSEVELT ISLAND
QUEENS
Roosevelt Island Tram
From Lower Level
To Upper Level
Queensboro Bridge
Queens–Midtown Tunnel
Tunnel Exit
Tunnel Entrance
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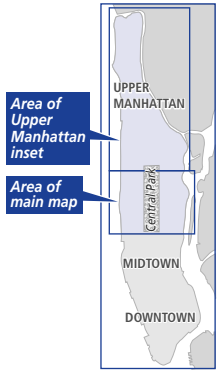
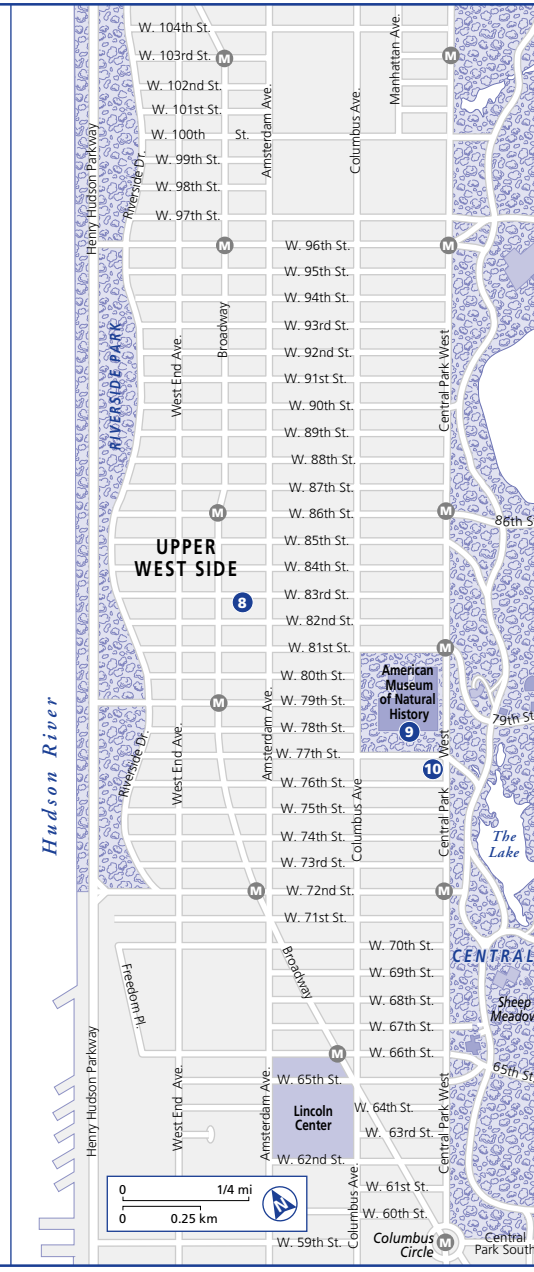
UPPER MANHATTAN
Central Park
UPTOWN
Area of detail
DOWNTOWN
M Subway stop

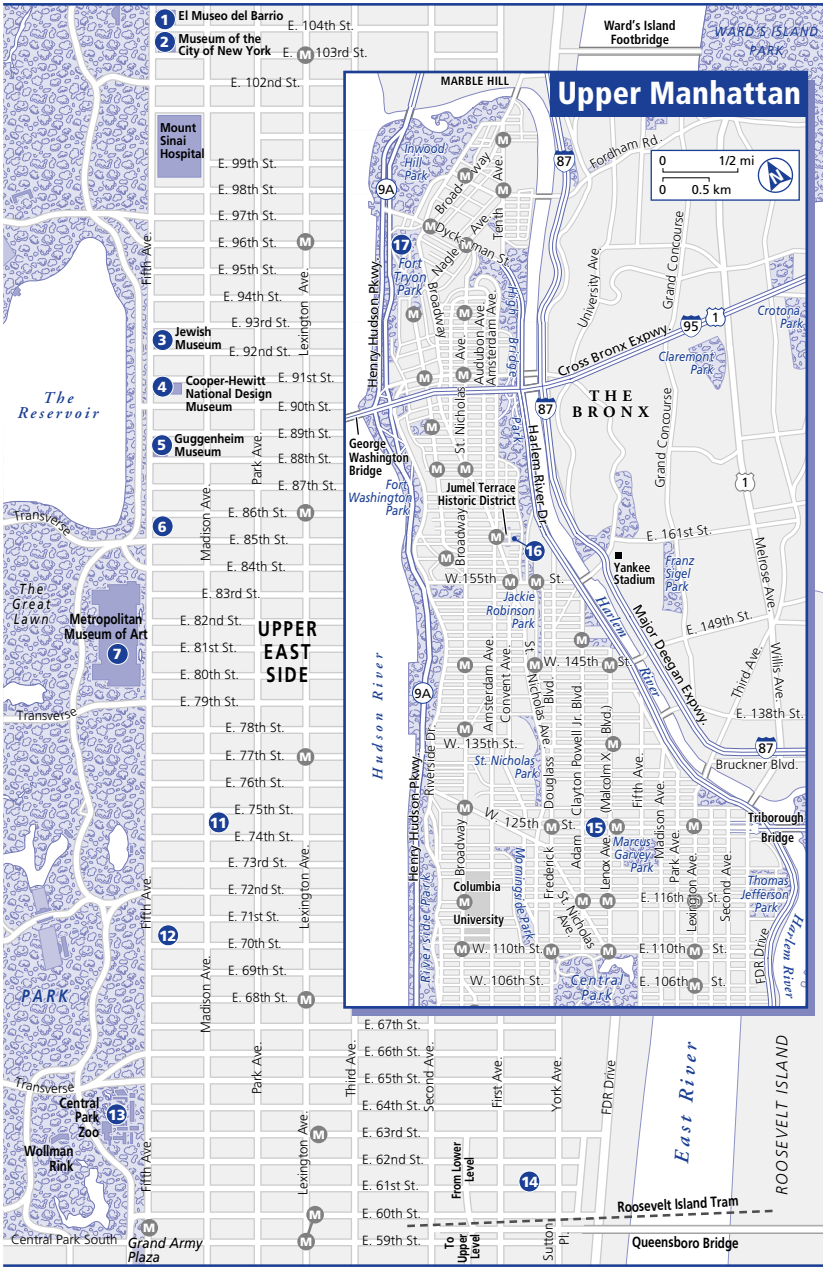
Uptown Manhattan Attractions

- American Museum of Natural History **9**
- Central Park Zoo **13**
- Children's Museum of Manhattan **8**
- The Cloisters **17**
- Cooper Hewitt **4**
- The Frick **12**
- Guggenheim Museum **5**
- Jewish Museum **3**
- Metropolitan Museum of Art **7**
- Morris-Jumel Mansion **16**
- Mount Vernon Hotel and Museum **14**
- Museo del Barrio **1**
- Museum of the City of New York **2**
- The Neue Museum **6**
- NY Historical Society **10**
- Studio Museum in Harlem **15**
- Whitney Museum **11**

Ⓜ Subway stop






Upper Manhattan
1 El Museo del Barrio
2 Museum of the City of New York
3 Jewish Museum
4 Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum
5 Guggenheim Museum
6
7 Metropolitan Museum of Art
11
12
13 Central Park Zoo
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17
Mount Sinai Hospital
Wollman Rink
Central Park South
Grand Army Plaza
The Reservoir
The Great Lawn
PARK
Transverse
UPPER EAST SIDE
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Lexington Ave.
Third Ave.
Second Ave.
First Ave.
York Ave.
FDR Drive
East River
ROOSEVELT ISLAND
Roosevelt Island Tram
Queensboro Bridge
Sutton Pl.
From Lower Level
To Upper Level
MARBLE HILL
Ward's Island Footbridge
WARD'S ISLAND PARK
Inwood Hill Park
Fort Tryon Park
Fordham Rd.
Broadway
Dyckman St.
Nagle Ave.
Tenth Ave.
Henry Hudson Pkwy.
Hudson River
George Washington Bridge
Fort Washington Park
Jumel Terrace Historic District
Broadway
St. Nicholas Ave.
Audubon Ave.
Amsterdam Ave.
Harlem River Drive
Harlem River Dr.
Cross Bronx Expwy.
University Ave
Grand Concourse
Crotona Park
Claremont Park
THE BRONX
E. 161st St.
Yankee Stadium
Franz Sigel Park
Melrose Ave.
Third Ave.
Willis Ave.
E. 149th St.
E. 138th St.
Bruckner Blvd.
Major Deegan Expwy.
Harlem River
W. 155th St.
Jackie Robinson Park
W. 145th St.
Convent Ave.
St. Nicholas Pl.
St. Nicholas Ave.
Douglass Blvd.
Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.
Amsterdam Ave.
W. 135th St.
St. Nicholas Park
Riverside Dr.
Henry Hudson Pkwy.
Riverside Park
W. 125th St.
Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. (Malcolm X Blvd.)
Fifth Ave.
Madison Ave.
Park Ave.
Lenox Ave.
Frederick Douglass Blvd.
Marcus Garvey Park
Triborough Bridge
Thomas Jefferson Park
Lexington Ave.
Second Ave.
E. 116th St.
E. 110th St.
W. 110th St.
Morningside Park
Columbia University
Central Park
W. 106th St.
E. 106th St.
FDR Drive
Harlem River
0 1/2 mi
0 0.5 km

The Empire State Building, in Brief

- Opened in 1931 after just 14 months of construction (total cost: $25 million)
- Tallest building in the world from 1931 to 1970, when the World Trade Center took the title. It is now the seventh tallest building on the planet.
- The oddly shaped spire at top was meant to be a landing port for blimps, but high winds kept dirigibles from ever being able to anchor here.
- In 1945, a plane accidentally crashed into the building, killing 17 people.
- Every Valentine's Day, 14 couples are married for free on the Observation Deck.

$7.50 students, $6.50 children 5–14; children under 5 not admitted; tours daily 9:30am–4:45pm, except for the last 2 weeks of Sept, when the U.N. is closed to visitors, and weekends in Dec and Jan; ❹, ❺, ❻, Ⓢ to Grand Central Station).

It's become fashionable of late in some political circles to denigrate the U.N. Though some reform is obviously necessary, a tour here will remind you of just how much the United Nations has done since its inception. It was founded, after all, with the express purpose of ensuring that there would never be another world war, and it has accomplished that, no small task. Perhaps more importantly, a visit here will remind you of how much potential the U.N. still has for effecting meaningful progress in numerous fields, from the elimination of disease and poverty to the resolution of ethnic conflicts.

Those who take the 45-minute tour will visit not only the General Assembly (where Khrushchev once famously pounded his shoe in anger) and the Security Council but also the less well-known Economic and Social Council Room that oversees the work of UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and 28 other U.N. programs of development (little-known fact: it's thanks to recommendations by the WHO that most countries have expiration dates stamped on milk). It's in this room that officials are working to create standardized tests for avian flu, vaccinate the world's children against polio, and promote the cause of world literacy. The Nobel Peace Prize won by the U.N. Peacekeeping forces in 2001 is displayed just outside the council room, along with an enlightening exhibit on the important work these troops are still doing throughout the world.

If you don't want to pony up $12 for the tour, you can still visit, taking in the lobby of the General Assembly building, with its free, changing exhibits (photojournalism mostly), meditation room, and the memorial stained-glass window Marc Chagall created for former Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1964 (to the right of the entrance). An international gift shop with trinkets from across the globe and the U.N. post office are in the basement. The sculpture garden is no longer open to the public, nor is the gallery at the Security Council when it's in session, but ordinary Joes can once again dine side by side with diplomats in the Delegates' Dining Room (call in advance for a reservation; men are required to wear jackets). My father was actually married at the U.N., so I can vouch for the food, which is quite good, especially if you hit it when a nation is sponsoring a celebratory buffet of its specialties.

United Nations, in Brief

The grounds: John D. Rockefeller purchased the land the U.N. now occupies for $8.5 million and then presented it as a gift to the organization. The buildings, appropriately enough, are all designed in the so-called International Style—uncluttered boxes of glass and stone meant to have an "elemental" or "international" look, completed in 1950. The 39-story glass building that looks a bit like a cigarette pack is the Secretariat, where every nation has offices and much of the nitty-gritty work of the U.N. gets done. At a right angle to the Secretariat is the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the newest of the structures, opened in 1961; on the other side of Secretariat is the General Assembly building.

Membership: When the United Nations was chartered in 1945, it originally had 51 members. Today, 191 countries are represented, their flags snapping in the wind in a most impressive display along First Avenue. Flags are ordered alphabetically in English starting with Afghanistan (on 48th St.) and ending with Zimbabwe.

An international experience: Meetings at the U.N. are conducted in six official languages: English, Mandarin, Spanish, French, Russian, and Arabic. Tours are conducted in 20 different languages by a bright young cadre of guides from approximately 25 countries.

LIBERTY BELLE: The great harbor of New York and the grand lady who guards it are, after the Empire State Building, the city's top must-visit attractions. You'll follow in the footsteps of the millions of immigrants and visitors who came here before you, their way lighted by the torch of the **Statue of Liberty** ★★ (Liberty Island, NY Harbor; ☎ 866/STATUE4 or 212/269-5755; www.nps.gov/stli; daily 9am–6pm; ferry fees: $12 adults, $9.50 for seniors and children 4–12; 1 to South Ferry, 4, 5 to Bowling Green, or R, W to Whitehall St.) and the promise inscribed on her base: that the "teeming masses yearning to breathe free" would find succor, freedom from persecution, and economic opportunity in this new land.

You will have a fine view of Lady Liberty from the shores of Battery Park, but if you have the time, it's worth it to board a ferry out to Liberty Island and take the official ranger tour of the monument. The tour includes a small museum on the history of the statue and the chance to stand just feet from the original torch, which had to be replaced in the mid-1980s due to severe water damage. In pre-9/11 days, this tour concluded with a thrilling, exhausting climb up a circular stairway to the crown of the statue, but due to security concerns visitors now can only get to the statue's base. From there, you peer through a glass ceiling at the intricate metal work that French engineer Gustave Eiffel (of the Eiffel Tower) created to anchor the statue; it acts like a spring, allowing the "skin" of the structure to adjust to different temperatures and sway up to 3 inches in 50-mph winds.

If you do want to take the tour—and I recommend it—it's extremely important to order timed tickets in advance, either by phone or through the website (see above). Some 3,000 visitors take the tour each day, but on certain days, in summer and around the holidays in particular, nearly 15,000 show up and have to be turned away. This is the one major New York site you really do have to plan ahead for, as only a small number of tickets are held for day-of-sale tours.

Those without tickets to the monument can take a ranger-led tour of the island, but the better option may be to simply stay on the ferry, which slows down as it approaches the statue, giving those onboard a good view of Lady Liberty in all of her surprisingly delicate beauty. Spend the time you'll save to go on to Ellis Island (see below), Liberty's sister monument, with no entrance quotas. I think Ellis is ultimately the more rewarding of the two sights.

THE GOLDEN DOOR: If you decide to get off the boat and tour **Ellis Island** ★★★ (www.nps.gov/elis; ferry fees: $12 adults, $9.50 seniors and children 4–12; daily 8:30am–6:15pm; 1 to South Ferry, or 4, 5 to Bowling Green, or R, W to Whitehall St.)—and you really should—you'll be visiting what was the epicenter of the largest migration in human history. In near-continuous use from 1892 to 1954, this was the point-of-entry processing center for the majority of immigrants (including my grandmother) hoping to settle in the U.S. during those years. Over 12 million people passed through its halls, sometimes as many as 12,000 in a single day.

The stories of these immigrants—what they were escaping, what they found once here, and what their short time in the purgatory that was Ellis Island was like—is movingly told here in a number of ways. First off there's a short film, narrated by Gene Hackman, which wraps the story up in a half-hour nutshell, but I think you'll find it much more enlightening (and fun) to follow the path that the immigrants themselves took, seeing the tale unfold room by room. Start in the second-floor Grand Hall (officially titled the "Registry Hall"), awe-inspiring with its massive white tile-vaulted ceiling (created by the same firm that did the ceiling in Grand Central Station's Oyster Bar). The room would have been filled with benches back in the day, but today there are just a handful of original ones that you can rest on while imagining what it must have been like for a voyage-weary Russian or Italian or Irishman to encounter this monumental, intimidating room—probably larger than any church or temple they had attended in their home village—on their very first day in America.

Behind the Grand Hall is a warren of small rooms where immigrants were tested for mental competency, literacy, and communicable diseases. How these tests were done—and the fear they inspired—is chronicled in historical photos, wall text, and most poignantly at listening stations, where immigrants share their memories of their time on the island. Illuminating exhibits on the role of immigrant aid societies, the place of women, the types of work immigrants tended to do in the U.S., and other issues, complete the floor.

The top floor of the museum chronicles the history of the processing facility itself, its problems with corruption, its physical structure, and the history of the island. These exhibits can be skipped if you're short on time, but don't miss the **"Treasures from Home"** exhibit, also on this floor, which features 2,000 of the possessions that were brought through Ellis. Somehow seeing the china dolls,

The Statue of Liberty, in Brief

The French connection: Dreamed up at a dinner party of French intellectuals in 1865, the statue was first proposed as a hundredth birthday present from France to the U.S. (and as a not-so-subtle jab at France's then-authoritarian Second Empire). Fund-raising woes kept it from being completed in time for that anniversary, but in 1881, after over a decade of begging for money (a lottery finally did the trick), sculptor Auguste Bartholdi was able to finish the massive work.

The battle for the base: Though the statue was completed in 1881, it took another 2 years for the Americans to keep their half of the bargain and create a pedestal for it. Newspaperman Joseph Pulitzer finally stepped in, and in a series of angry editorials condemning the wealthy for not contributing, he finally convinced thousands of lower-income Americans to send in what they could to get the job done. Thanks to their dimes and nickels, the pedestal was finally built (designed by Richard Morris Hunt) and the statue was dedicated on October 28, 1886.

Crafting the Lady: *Repoussé,* a technique of hammering and shaping thin strips of copper, was used to create Lady Liberty. Though the statue is massive at over 151 feet (47m) from base to torch, the "skin" of the piece is just 3/32 of an inch thick (or 2.38mm). It is thought that the ancient Colossus of Rhodes was built using this method.

A key to the symbolism: Every piece of the statue has meaning. The seven rays in the crown represent the seven seas of the world, and the 25 windows there give a nod to the 25 gemstones found on earth. On the tablet Liberty is holding are inscribed the Roman numerals for July 4, 1776. And though it's difficult to see, Liberty is breaking shackles with her right foot.

the precious wedding photos, the native costumes, and the letters home brings the immigrant experience more vividly to life than any other part of the museum. If you have time, return to the first floor, and browse through the **"Peopling of America"** exhibit that discusses the ethnic make-up of the U.S. today. In all, you should allot a minimum of 2 hours for a visit here; there's a cafeteria on-site should you need a break, along with the **"American Family History Center,"** where American visitors can track their genealogical history online with the help of on-site librarians.

I am one of the 40% of all Americans who had a relative come through Ellis Island, and I find it difficult to tour this museum without tearing up at some point. I have no doubt that even those visitors without this direct a connection will find the journey through Ellis to be one of the most moving experiences of their New York visit.

SITE OF THE UNTHINKABLE: The boat from Ellis and Liberty Island will deposit you in Battery Park City, just a short walk through the canyons of the

Financial District to Ground Zero (along the way, you may want to take my walking tour (p. 217), which will introduce you to the gems of the neighborhood of Lower Manhattan). Seeing these sights over the course of a single morning or afternoon is a moving and highly logical way to tour the tip of Manhattan.

I wonder if it's as difficult for visitors to gaze upon the **World Trade Center** site (the open space between Church, Barclay, Liberty, and West sts.; www.nycvisit.com for further information; C, E to World Trade Center), as it is for me to write about it. For those of us who live in New York and lost friends to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the site is a haunted place, a vast, windy hole that I personally find difficult to look at. The grayness of it, the immeasurable emptiness of this rectangular cavern, remains an open wound.

Most visitors who come are surprised by its size. Though the World Trade Center towers were not the tallest buildings in the world at the time of the attack, they had the greatest volume, supplying over 12 million square feet of office space and housing 350 different firms and organizations. In any one day, approximately 50,000 people came to work here and another 70,000 visited the towers, either for business purposes, to shop in the vast underground mall at its base, or to go to the observation deck. One of the few blessings of 9/11 was the timing of the attacks; had they occurred just 1 hour later in the day, hundreds of tourists would likely have been trapped on the observation decks, thousands of additional office workers would have been killed, and the death toll—already horrific at nearly 3,000—would have risen even higher.

As a New Yorker I have memories of that day that are seared into my brain as if by branding iron. I was in my Midtown office when the first plane struck the towers at 8:45am and will never forget the 2½-mile trudge home, walking into the crowds of businessmen and -women, painted gray, head to toe, with ashes from the towers. I will never forget the painful, burning smell that enveloped me the farther downtown I went and hung over our neighborhood for months; the military vehicles patrolling the streets in my area, all cars banished; and the crowds at the supermarket, snapping up water and trading rumors. But what stays with me most of all was the sight of those towers crashing to earth. I happened to be standing on the street by a bar with a TV on when the second tower fell, surrounded by a group of people trying to get home. Strangers all, we cried out as one when it happened, hands reaching towards the screen as if we could stop the descent of glass and steel. To my right was a young Hispanic woman, desperately dialing her cellphone, trying to get through to someone who worked at the World Trade Center. I've always wondered if her call ever got through.

As I write this, a visitor center is still in the planning stages, but there are interesting and well-written signs along the fence around the site called the **Wall of Heroes** that will give you more information on the Towers and September 11.

CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD: On to happier matters. At some point in your stay you're going to want to see **Times Square** ★ (Broadway and Seventh Ave., between 42nd and 47th sts.; www.timessquarebid.org; 1, 2, 3, N, Q, R, W, S to Times Sq.), if only briefly, a touchstone for the New York experience. As Adam Gopnik wrote in *The New Yorker,* "No other part of New York has had such a melodramatic sensitivity to the changes in the city's history, with an image for every decade." Think for a moment and those visions of Times Square should

start flooding your mind: snazzy clubs and peroxide-blond chorus girls in the 1920s and '30s, sailors kissing girls at the end of World War II, the wisecracking small-time hoods of *Guys and Dolls* in the '50s, and, of course, the bleak urban decay of the '60s and '70s when, as Gopnik put it, "everything fell apart and Hell wafted up through the manhole covers."

Times Square is back on the upswing now, the porn shops banished and crime held (mostly) at bay. To get the full effect of today's Square, it's imperative you visit at night. It's then that the rainbow glitter of the flashing lights from the dozens of billboards, giant TV screens, electronic news crawls, and headlights of cars whizzing by wash over the Square, sweeping all of the litter and crowds into the background. The effect is like watching fireworks.

(This tradition of massive "spectaculars" is codified into law. In the 1980s, ordinances were passed requiring that new buildings abutting the Square have 16,000 square feet of light shows on their facades, with "moving elements" that are sufficiently bright—and the city monitors the brightness using a measuring system they called LUTS or Light Unit Times Square).

Beyond this theater of the streets is the legitimate theater, and Times Square still has more playhouses per acre than any other area in North America. For full information on the theater scene, visit chapter 10, "Nightlife in the City that Never Sleeps."

Other attractions by the dozens crowd Times Square, but only three should be visited, to my mind: The Virgin Megastore (largest media store in the world), Toys 'R Us (with its kid-pleasing Ferris wheel), and Sephora (where you can spray on perfume until you faint from the fumes at no cost whatsoever). And while you can't "visit" the following sites, you can peer into the sidewalk-level television studios of

Times Square, in Brief

What's in the name: Originally known as Longacre Square, it was the center of the horse-and-carriage trade until the early 1900s, when theaters started claiming the neighborhood. In 1904, the *New York Times* took up residence on the Square, a half-mile up from the (then) much more developed Herald Square, named for the *Times*'s big competitor, the now defunct *New York Herald*.

The lullaby of Broadway: Today there are 38 theaters in the Times Square area, though only four front Broadway itself.

Ringing in the new: At the northern end of the square, the skinny skyscraper that stands between Broadway and Seventh Avenue (there's been a steaming CUP A SOUP billboard on it for a number of years now) is the famed building where the ball drops down on New Year's Eve. A 1,070-pound crystal ball is placed at the top and then lowered by computer near midnight (the computerization of the ball has actually led to its being late or early for the past several years, as the handlers have less control than they did when they could shout at the fellows who were pulling the ropes, "Hurry up." The speed of descent is now set in advance). To read more about "doing" Times Square on New Year's Eve, go to p. 312.

Good Morning America (44th and Broadway) and the NASDAQ (43rd and Broadway). If you hear the piercing screams of preteens, look up and you may see the cameras of MTV's *Total Request Live* scanning the area from the second-floor studios between 44th and 45th streets on Broadway.

What else occupies Times Square? Only spots that should be avoided, like the outrageously expensive and kitschy **Madame Tussaud's** (234 W. 42nd St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/719-9440; www.nycwax.com; $29 adults, $26 seniors, $23 children; Mon–Fri 10am–8pm, Sat–Sun 10am–10pm)—if you must visit it, be sure to go to its website first for a discount coupon. Also to be avoided are half a dozen overpriced, downright bad chain restaurants, and stores that you'll see in every mall in America, but that are more expensive here.

GET A PIECE OF THE ROCK: Once you've done Times Square, repair immediately to the area that outclasses it by a mile, and has more to interest fans of architecture and city planning: **Rockefeller Center** ★★ (between Fifth and Sixth aves., 48th to 51st sts.; ☎ 212/632-3975; www.rockefellercenter.com; B, D, F to Rockefeller Center), Gotham's splendid "city within a city." Built in the 1930s at the height of the Depression—thanks to the jobs it gave construction workers, it was the second largest employer in the city after the federal Works Progress Association (or WPA) at the time—it remains a marvel of elegance and aspiration, a several-blocks-wide collection of 19 buildings that, despite their mass, create a space that is airy and light, a welcoming haven for both tourists and visitors. No matter how many times I come here, I still get goose bumps on the walk from Fifth Avenue through the gardened central walk—called "The Channel," as it runs between the French and the British buildings. Follow this path down to the **ice-skating rink** (the first commercial one in the world), and the golden statue of ***Prometheus,*** or "Leaping Louie" as wits have called him over the years, his prone position under the soaring vertical of the RCA building making him look like he just jumped. If you'd like to skate here, the tab will be hefty at $9 to $13 ($7–$8 for children and seniors), plus $7 for skate rental, but the charm of the experience makes it well worth the price (the rink is open Oct to mid-Mar, Mon–Thurs 9am–10:30pm, Fri–Sat 9am–midnight, Sun 8:30am–10:30pm).

There's much to see at the Rock. Directly behind the statue is where the yearly 70-plus-foot Christmas tree is set on November 20 each year, a plaque marking the space. In warmer months this plaza is often used for art exhibits, craft fairs, and other public exhibitions. Take a left and walk towards 49th Street to the small side street with the glassed-in TV studio on the corner. This is where NBC's ***Today Show*** is taped, the small street the area where sign-waving crowds gather every weekday morning, as early as 5:30am, to attempt to get their faces on TV. (When the show has musical performances, the guests play on a stage in this narrow alley—it looks much bigger on TV, doesn't it?) Stroll next to Fifth Avenue between 50th and 51st streets, where *Prometheus*'s brother, mighty ***Atlas,*** the finest piece of art in the complex (by artist Lee Lawrie), hoists a giant globe on his shoulders, muscles rippling. From the back, *Atlas* looks a bit like a Christ figure, especially superimposed on St. Patrick's Cathedral across the street (which, in case you were wondering, is a copy of Cologne Cathedral in Germany). Go into the lobby behind *Atlas* for a peek at one of the most magnificent public spaces in the city, the walls bedecked with a rare, swirling Greek marble, the gold "curtains" at the side creating an ever-changing dance of shadows on the ceiling.

Although I don't recommend the Rockefeller City tour (it doesn't go anywhere you can't yourself, and the guides are a dull lot), the **NBC Studio tour** (☎ 212/664-7174; www.shopnbc.com; $18 adults, $16 seniors and children ages 6–16; under 6 not admitted; Mon–Sat 8:30am–5:30pm, Sun 9:30am–4:30pm; B, D, F to Rockefeller Center) will be of interest to *Saturday Night Live* and Conan O'Brien fans—both studios are usually visited. Other than that, it's a relentless commercial for NBC and can get wearying. Better is a trip to **Top of the Rock** ★★ (30 Rockefeller Plaza; ☎ 212/698-2000; http://topoftherocknyc.com; $13 adults, $12 seniors, $9 children 6–12; daily 8:30am–midnight; B, D, F to Rockefeller Center), the newly reopened 70th-floor Observation Deck at Rockefeller Center. While not as high as the one in the Empire State Building, it's going to give the latter a run for its money with its own striking views (you have a much better vista of Central Park from here, a grand bumpy green blanket, laid at your feet) and its use of timed tickets, which eliminate the painful waits that can sour the experience at its rival. The Rock reopened in November 2005, re-creating very closely the cruise-ship-themed look of the deck from the '30s, when it was first constructed. It's a wonderful addition to the Rockefeller Center experience.

Finally, **Radio City Music Hall** (1260 Avenue of the Americas at 50th St.; ☎ 212/247-4777; www.radiocity.com; $50–$250 show tickets, $10 tour tickets; B, D, F to Rockefeller Center) remains the kitschy, thrilling delight it's always been: the Christmas and Easter shows both marvels of excess, with hundreds of people and hooved animals on the stage at one time; orchestras magically rising from the pit; laser lights throwing patterns around the theater; and best of all, the Rockette chorus line, that superhuman all-leg dancing machine. The precision of the Rockettes' routines, the dazzling white of their smiles, the sight of all of those legs in a row—being a native New Yorker, there's nothing else that says "Christmas" quite so loudly for me.

Those who don't want to shell out for a show, or who visit when the theater is dark, can take the tour, which is well worth it, to see the many pieces of art and the exquisite Art Deco features of this sensational pleasure hall.

A MAN, A PLAN, A SPAN: New York has a grand Gothic cathedral in St. Patrick's, but for many New Yorkers, the city's true cathedral, the point at which earth and water join and thrust upwards towards the heavens, is the **Brooklyn Bridge** ★★★ (entrance at Centre St. in lower Manhattan; J, M, Z, 4, 5, 6 to Brooklyn Bridge). The greatest engineering feat of its day, it remains one of the most breathtaking structures in the city.

To fully appreciate its dazzle, you must walk the bridge. Start on the Manhattan side and walk first to one of the great Gothic towers that hold up the bridge's cables. It took 7 years and massive heartbreak to build these two structures. Architect and immigrant John A. Roebling died surveying the area in 1869 (just 2 weeks after the project had been approved): he was standing on a pier when a ferry accidentally rammed into it, crushing his foot. He died of lockjaw 3 weeks later. His son Washington took over and created a method of sending pneumatic caissons, basically large pressurized pine boxes into which compressed air was pumped to keep the water out, down to the river bed. This allowed six workers at a time to descend and lay the foundation for these towers. Because they didn't have a good understanding of the effects of underwater pressure on the human

body (known to scuba divers as "the bends"), many were killed or injured in the caissons, including Washington Roebling. In 1872 he had to be carried out of the chamber, partially paralyzed. He remained an invalid for the rest of his life, and his wife Martha took over directing the job, learning advanced mathematics in the process. Washington watched the progress of the bridge through binoculars from his apartment, and when the bridge was competed after 13 years, Grover Cleveland (then president), the governor, and the mayor all came to his home to personally thank him for his efforts.

Walk to the center of the bridge and take in the spectacular views of both Brooklyn and Manhattan. When the bridge was built, its span—1,595 feet—was the longest leap across an open space of any on Earth, and the first bridge to connect Manhattan with any of the lands that surrounded it. Take a look up at the cables; these, too, were an innovation, the first steel cables to be used on a bridge (before then cables were made of iron). It took 2 years to string the cables back and forth before work could begin building the suspension bridge. The cables each contain 5,434 wires and weigh 870 tons. Take a moment at the Brooklyn side to read the plaque on the construction of the bridge.

When you depart the bridge, consider taking a stroll in brownstone-heavy Brooklyn Heights, the first neighborhood in the city to be landmarked. You can catch the A train at Cadman Plaza/High Street back to Manhattan.

ICONIC MUSEUMS

As I've noted before, there are scores of museums in New York. But four are so grand in scope and ambition, so profound in their impact upon the visitor, that they have to be counted as iconic experiences.

THE GREAT HOME OF CLASSIC ART: The **Metropolitan Museum of Art** ★★★ kids (1000 Fifth Ave., between 80th and 84th sts.; ☎ 212/536-7710; www.met.org; suggested donation $15 adults, $10 seniors, $7 students; Tues–Thurs and Sun 9:30am–5:30pm, Fri–Sat 9:30am–9pm; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.) is the giant among New York museums, and the finest art museum in this hemisphere, the equivalent of the Louvre in Paris, the Prado in Madrid, the Uffizi in Florence, and the British Museum in London. Among all the "must-visit" sites of New York, this is the one that simply can't be skipped. Whatever your interest in art—and even if you usually have no interest in art—you will find something here to astonish you, to enlighten and enrich your life. I solemnly promise. No, really, I do.

The Met was founded fairly late, as great museums go, conceived in 1870 by a group of wealthy businessmen and artists; a decade later, the museum's collection had grown so rapidly that Calvert Vaux, one of the architects of Central Park, was brought in to create the first red-brick building on this site (you can see that facade still—it's the side wall of the European Sculpture Court). A little over a decade later, another expansion was necessary, so famed architect Richard Morris Hunt was tapped to create the majestic, Indiana limestone, neoclassical edifice that still stands today, awing the visitors who climb its mountain of steps and walk past its redwood-height pillars. (One oddity of the facade: Because money ran out during construction, the square pediments on the front that were meant to house statuary were left empty. The building was landmarked and locked into its current appearance before that deficiency could be addressed.) Never a static institution, the

museum and its collection have continued to grow, with the Met currently the owner of three million works of art spanning 5,000 years. The building has expanded accordingly, taking over acre upon acre of former parkland to reach its current size—a quarter of a mile long, encompassing 2 million square feet of floor space.

Obviously, there's no way to see it all in one, two, or even five visits. So you must choose carefully among the 18 curatorial departments and decide what interests you most. One way to do so is by taking one of the hour-long scholarly "Highlight" tours—free with admission and offered five times a day—led by volunteer docents. These enthusiastic art lovers are a treasure in and of themselves, highly trained and well-spoken. They'll run you all over the museum, pointing out and expounding upon the various gems of the collection, offering a quick taste of the museum's highlights so that you can come back yourself and feast upon what really interests you.

If I had a gun to my head and was asked to pick the top five highlights, I'd select:

- **The European paintings collection** on the second floor, with such jewels as Velazquez's truer-than-life portrait of Juan de Pareja (the slave whom the painter respected enough—you can see it in the painting—to set free); El Greco's brooding landscape of Toledo; the 20 Rembrandts here, including *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* (three great Greeks in one painting—notice the pendant of Alexander the Great hanging from his shirt); five light-kissed Vermeers; five rooms of Degas; a roomful of Van Goghs; and works by Manet, Monet, de Goya, Breughel, Van Eyck, and every other master you read about in your college art-history course.
- **The period rooms,** which re-create dozens of important rooms, including Louis XIV's state bedroom in Versailles, and the stunning Cubiculum from Boscoreale, a perfectly preserved, brilliantly colorful room from a villa a mile from Pompeii that was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Other highlights: Frank Lloyd Wright's Arts and Crafts Living Room, and a serene 16th-century Ming Scholar's audience hall from China. Whenever I visit these rooms I'm always reminded of the terrific children's novel *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankwiler,* in which the children slept each night in a historic bed. Share it with your tweens and they'll be dying to come here.
- **The American Collection,** the most comprehensive in the world, features masterworks by Sargent, Homer, Tiffany, Leutze (his sentimental but rippingly fun *Washington Crossing the Delaware*), and many more.
- **The Egyptian Collection** includes some pieces discovered by the Met's own teams of archaeologists, such as the miniature figures found in a tomb in Thebes that show in intricate detail what daily life for a wealthy Egyptian was like. There are also elaborate statuary, mummy cases, jewelry, wall paintings, and the Temple of Dendur, an actual temple to the goddess Isis (c. 15 B.C.) that was saved from the rising waters of the Nile after the construction of the Aswan Dam.
- The hidden **Hall of Art from Japan,** with its famed Iris Screens (on many Metropolitan Museum products), is also home to architectural-looking suits of armor, delicate woodcuts, and dazzling kimonos. To my mind, this one of the most ravishingly beautiful sections of the museum.

These five are what I'd pick if my life were at stake, but the truth is, I'd be just as happy exploring other areas of the museum. As I said before, there's just no way to go wrong here.

Along with all the art, the Met has half a dozen pricey cafes and restaurants, wonderful gift shops and bookstores, and tremendously engaging art and culture programs for children of all ages (mostly on the weekends; visit the website for more information).

PLANETS, PRIMATES, AND OTHER DELIGHTS: The American Museum of Natural History ★★★ (Central Park West, between 79th and 81st sts.; ☎ 212/769-5100; www.amnh.org; suggested donation $14; daily 10am–5:45pm; B, C to 81st St.) presents this irony: The greatest natural history museum in the United States sits plump in the middle of this city of concrete and steel. Since 1869, the American Museum of Natural History has served as both the country's preeminent private scientific research facility and its top museum for paleontology, zoology, anthropology and, in recent years, astronomy. It's this constant flow of energy and insight between the research side and the curatorial side that has kept the museum fiercely vital, fresh, and unique. Just a few years ago, for example, scientists concluded that dinosaurs had not dragged their tails as had long been thought but waved them in the air as they walked. The curators responded, painstakingly dismantling the Museum's famed dino skeletons and reassembling them with tails erect. Then, in a brilliant stroke, they placed one skeleton atop a section of a Texas riverbed where they had found fossilized dino footprints (sans tail-dragging marks), giving museum-goers a peephole into how new scientific theories emerge.

This double spotlight on the science itself and on how science is "made" is one of the pleasures of a visit here, with many of the exhibits focusing on the current "educated guesses" and the scientists who are making them. An extraordinarily interactive museum, it challenges visitors to figure out which theories make the most sense via computer stations, wall text, videos, soundscapes, and, of course, the artifacts themselves.

Start your visit by exploring the dinosaur rooms on the fourth floor, as these tend to get most crowded later in the day. The museum has the largest such collection in the world, and the hot questions surrounding dinosaurs—How did they die out? Did they care for their young? Did they live in organized herds?—are fully explored. Also on this floor is the equally fascinating "Wallace Wing of Mammals and Their Extinct Relatives" exhibit; make time for it if you can.

Floors 2 and 3 are diorama driven, with half the floors devoted to the anthropological study of the various peoples of the world; the other half to African and North American mammals. If you're short on time, take the mammal route, which features the poetic work of taxidermist/zoologist/sculptor Carl Akeley, who eventually died in Africa while collecting animals to stuff and display. Akeley pioneered a new technique of sculpting papier-mâché, which he would then cover with actual animal skins, antlers, and hoofs, often using the animal's bones for structure as well. The results are remarkably lifelike. The exhibit also fulfills his mission to conserve these animals and their environment for future generations—some of the wilderness areas depicted have changed beyond recognition in the past 50 years.

Planning Tips for the Museum of Natural History

Timing your visit: Because the museum is so popular with school groups, it's difficult to predict when the museum will be crowded. In general, attendance is in inverse proportion to the weather: When it's lovely outside, the crowds will be sparse within. When it's blustery or rainy . . . watch out. Weekdays tend to be less crowded than weekends.

An overview tour: First-time visitors should consider taking one of the guided introductory tours that begin at 15 minutes past the hour throughout the day. Led by highly knowledgeable and well-spoken volunteer guides (they take classes for 6 months), tours do vary by guide and will often hit different highlights of the museum.

Especially for kids: Families with children will want to visit the **Discovery Room,** an educational center where kids can pretend to dig up dinosaur bones, do a scavenger hunt, work with microscopes, and more. Timed tickets are given for admission here, so be sure to grab one early in the day before they run out.

Other highlights of the older three-quarters of the museum include the dazzling Hall of Minerals, with its Fabergé-carved gems and the largest star sapphire in the world; the Hall of Ocean Life (with its famed 10-ton blue whale replica hanging from the ceiling); and the Hall of Biodiversity, which tells the tale of the 30,000 species facing extinction each year.

The newest section of the museum, the **Rose Center for Earth and Space** ★★★ has been widely hailed as one of the most architecturally important new buildings in New York—a monumental 120-foot-high glass box enveloping a colossal sphere, which is the new virtual reality theater, the Hayden Planetarium. When you first enter the museum, be sure to get one of the timed tickets to a planetarium show, a highlight of any visit. In 2006, the museum will debut a new show on collisions in space that promises to be the first planetarium show ever that could double as an action flick. After or before the show, you'll want to explore the Cullman Hall of the Universe, which is devoted to discoveries in astrophysics, and the spellbinding Hall of Planet Earth, which tackles the issues of how our planet evolved and what makes it habitable.

I WANT MY MOMA: As of 2004, Modern is new again, thanks to a $425-million expansion designed by Japanese architect Yoshio Tanigushi that nearly doubled the space at the renowned **Museum of Modern Art** ★★ (11 W. 53rd St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/708-9431; www.moma.org; $20 adults, $16 seniors, $12 students; Sat–Mon and Wed–Thurs 10:30am–5:30pm, Fri 10:30am–8pm; E, V to Fifth Ave.). A substantial chunk of the museum's collection can now be displayed in the 125,000 square feet of gallery space available for contemporary art, prints, and illustrated books (on the 2nd floor); architecture, design, and drawings (3rd floor); and all of the old favorites in the painting and sculpture collection (4th and 5th floors). The sculpture garden has also expanded

Sightseeing Passes

Sightseeing costs add up quickly, but passes allow visitors to visit a number of museums and attractions for one reasonable rate. Of the two major options available for Big Apple sightseeing, I think the **City Pass** (☎ 208/737-4800; www.citypass.com) offers the best value. Though it only allows entry to six major attractions (The American Museum of Natural History, The Museum of Modern Art, The Circle Line Sightseeing Cruise, The Observatory Deck of the Empire State Building, The Guggenheim Museum, and the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum), it gives the user a full 9 days to use these tickets.

The cost of the pass is $53 for adults, $41 for kids between the ages of 6 and 17, which may sound like a lot, but if you visit only the first four attractions on the list above, you'll save $20. Visit all six and the discount will come to $103. In a special version of the pass, created in cooperation with the History Channel, passholders also get two-for-one admissions to many of the downtown museums, including the New York City Police Museum, South Street Seaport Museum, Fraunces Tavern, and Museum of Jewish Heritage.

A second contender, the **New York Pass** (☎ 888/714-1999; www.newyorkpass), grants admission to a full 43 sites and tours but (and this is a big but) its $49 pass ($39 for kids) is only good for 1 day, meaning that you'd have to move pretty quickly to get your money's worth. Buy a 2-day pass and the tab nearly doubles to $89, with 3 days at $109 and 7 at a whopping $139. Though the New York Pass does give you "line skipping" rights, as the City Pass does, you'll need to go to the admissions window and exchange your voucher for a ticket—a real time-waster (especially at the Empire State Building).

Still, the New York Pass does cover many important sites that the City Pass does not, including the United Nations tour, the Rockefeller Center tour, and the ferry to the Statue of Liberty. My advice? Create an itinerary and then crunch the numbers to see which option will work best for you.

from 18,400 square feet to 22,400 square feet, and there's more room as well for special exhibitions (on the 6th and 3rd floors).

Along with all of this growth is a palpable feeling of excitement that you'll notice as you wander the halls. This seems to be where all the "cool people" are hanging out, those bright, design-savvy New Yorkers with the architectural glasses and spiky haircuts. As you go from gallery to gallery, or visit the on-site restaurant (which, by the by, has the best-quality food of any museum in Manhattan), the chatter among visitors has an intensity and passion that are quite unusual.

But not all is rosy at the new MOMA. The entrance fee is a painful $20, higher by far than any other museum in the city (though, thankfully, the museum has recently stopped charging extra for audio guides). And the museum itself has

been redesigned and curated in a manner that's not necessarily friendly to the visitor. Pride of place has been given to the Contemporary Collection (which will be the first space you'll encounter after the lobby), a decision sure to challenge the navigational skills of the vast majority of visitors who have come here expressly to see the Picassos, Van Goghs, and Matisses hidden far up on the fifth floor. Galleries, too, can be confusingly laid out, with four exits often leading out of one gallery; I spent my last visit worrying that I was missing galleries as I stumbled through white box after white box, with little sense of where each exhibit began and ended.

These factors make it important (more than at almost any other New York museum) to sit down with a map of the facility (ask for it when you pay the entrance fee) and map out what you want to see—you've paid a lot of money and if you don't have a plan, you'll run out of time for what really interests you. If you haven't been here before, you will probably want to begin with the Modern Masters, artwork from 1840 to 1945, which is on the fifth floor. Several "Mona Lisas" grace this area:

- Vincent van Gogh's ***Starry Night,*** which has an even more vivid impact when viewed in person, the thickness of the brush strokes making it as much sculpture as painting. Created a year before his suicide, when van Gogh was in an insane asylum, the painting is filled with premonitions of what was to come, the foreground taken up with a soaring cypress tree, symbol of death.
- Pablo Picasso's ***Desmoiselles d'Avignon,*** a massive brothel scene in which Picasso experimented with a number of art styles—look closely and you'll see that one of the women's heads looks like an African mask, another profile is taken from Egyptian art, the woman in the middle assumes a classical Venus-like pose, and a leg of one of the figures devolves into cubist abstraction. Reportedly, Picasso painted the work when he was suffering from syphilis, which may be why the women appear so threatening.
- Salvador Dali's ***Persistence of Memory,*** in which watches melt and a long-nosed figure (some say it was a selfportrait of Dali; others think it represents an unborn baby) lies prostate on the ground. You may be surprised at how small this seminal work is.

Soaring sculptures by Brancusi, vibrantly colorful masterpieces by Matisse, absurdist creations by Deschamps, and painted metaphors by Magritte are among the other wonders of the museum's collection, the most important in the world for art of this era.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S MASTERPIECE: New York is the city of the rectangle, of the sharp right angle. Our streets form a severe grid; our buildings are boxy and regular. Until you get to the **Guggenheim Museum** ★★★ (1071 Fifth Ave., at 89th St.; ☎ 212/423-3500; www.guggenheim.org.; $15 adults, $10 students and seniors; Sat–Wed 10am–5:45pm, Fri 10am–8pm; ❹, ❺, ❻ to 86th St.), that is. Frank Lloyd Wright's delirious spiral of a museum sits among the towers of Fifth Avenue like a steroidal peacock among guinea hens. Architectural critic Herbert Muschamp described the look best when he wrote, "What else but a building brought back from a dream would be windowless, have walls and floors that tilt and twist, begin on the top floor, and spiral in toward the center like an enigma."

Museum-Hopping with Children

Going to museums with children shouldn't be a medicinal experience: healthy for all, but hard to swallow. There *are* ways to make museums fun, especially the varied, rich museums of Gotham. Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind for your next visit with the kids:

1. **Timing:** Don't plan on staying for more than 2 hours at any museum with children under 10, and follow your sightseeing with a "kidcentric" activity, such as kicking back in a playground in Central Park (near most of the art museums).
2. **Advance planning:** Go to a museum's website before your visit to see if there are any special children's programs scheduled on the day of your visit. The Metropolitan, the Museum of Natural History, the Guggenheim, and others all offer kids' tours and art sessions free with the cost of admission.
3. **Fun and games:** Create a scavenger hunt for your child. With kids over 7, go into the gift shop as soon as you enter the museum and have them pick out three postcards. Then have your child search the museum until he or she finds those pieces of art. Your child can then use the postcard to write to family or friends about their experience. With younger children, give them a sheet of paper on which you will have drawn a bird, a dog, a baby, and a crown (or other symbols if you prefer); give the child the task of making a mark next to that symbol every time they see it and then count up the number of "scores" at the end of the visit. Trust me, these games work, and they're sneaky ways to get the kids to pay attention to the art.
4. **The talking cure:** Consider investing in the headphone tour if the museum has one for children. The one at the Museum of Modern Art, in particular, is extremely fun (in fact it's better than the adult's audio tour . . . but that's another story altogether).
5. **Stroller strategy:** Check to see what the stroller policy is before you get to a museum. Some museums don't allow them at all; others only allow them on certain days of the week—and there's nothing worse than having to lug a squirming toddler (who could be napping peacefully in a stroller) through a crowded museum.

Visiting the center of this 1959 masterpiece and trudging up the ramps of curving halls transforms the standard museum experience into a profound journey (and sometimes a battle against vertigo), no matter what artworks are on display. Early critics dismissed the museum (*Newsweek*'s insipid review was headlined "Museum or cupcake?"), but I think today even the most jaded visitor will feel the power of the place, the symbolic weight of infinite circle upon circle upon circle.

New York's museum is now one among five Guggenheims (in Venice, Berlin, Las Vegas, and most famously Frank Gehry's Bilbao), making it the "McDonald's"

of the art world, a chain of museums that has managed to remain terrifically popular wherever it hangs its architecturally daring shingle. Part of that popularity, beyond the buildings, has resulted from its ability to formulate blockbuster retrospectives on topics that combine art with history and in some cases sociology—shows on Aztec culture, motorcycles, and Brazilian art, to mention just a few that have created headlines in the past few years. In her review of 2005's "Russia! Exhibit"—a tour de force of art, ranging from Byzantine icons all the way to the installation art of today—Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* wrote that the museum now has an "increasingly foolproof formula for presenting engrossing, impeccably installed spectaculars that, flaws and all, offer a lot to all levels of the art-viewing public, from bikers to the cognoscenti." I'd add that it's a very different sort of experience from other NY museums—populist, yes, but also engrossing, sweeping, and usually just plain fun.

Aside from the architecture and changing exhibits, the Guggenheim is known for its concentration of artworks by Kandinsky (150 in all), Brancusi, Picasso, Miró, and Mondrian, among other modernists. These pieces are always on display in the second-floor Tannheuser Collection room; there's also a dedicated gallery (until 2007) just for Kandinsky's work on the fourth floor.

And to answer the question that nobody ever voices aloud: No, there haven't been any suicide jumps from over the low-slung rails, nor has anyone ever accidentally fallen to their death.

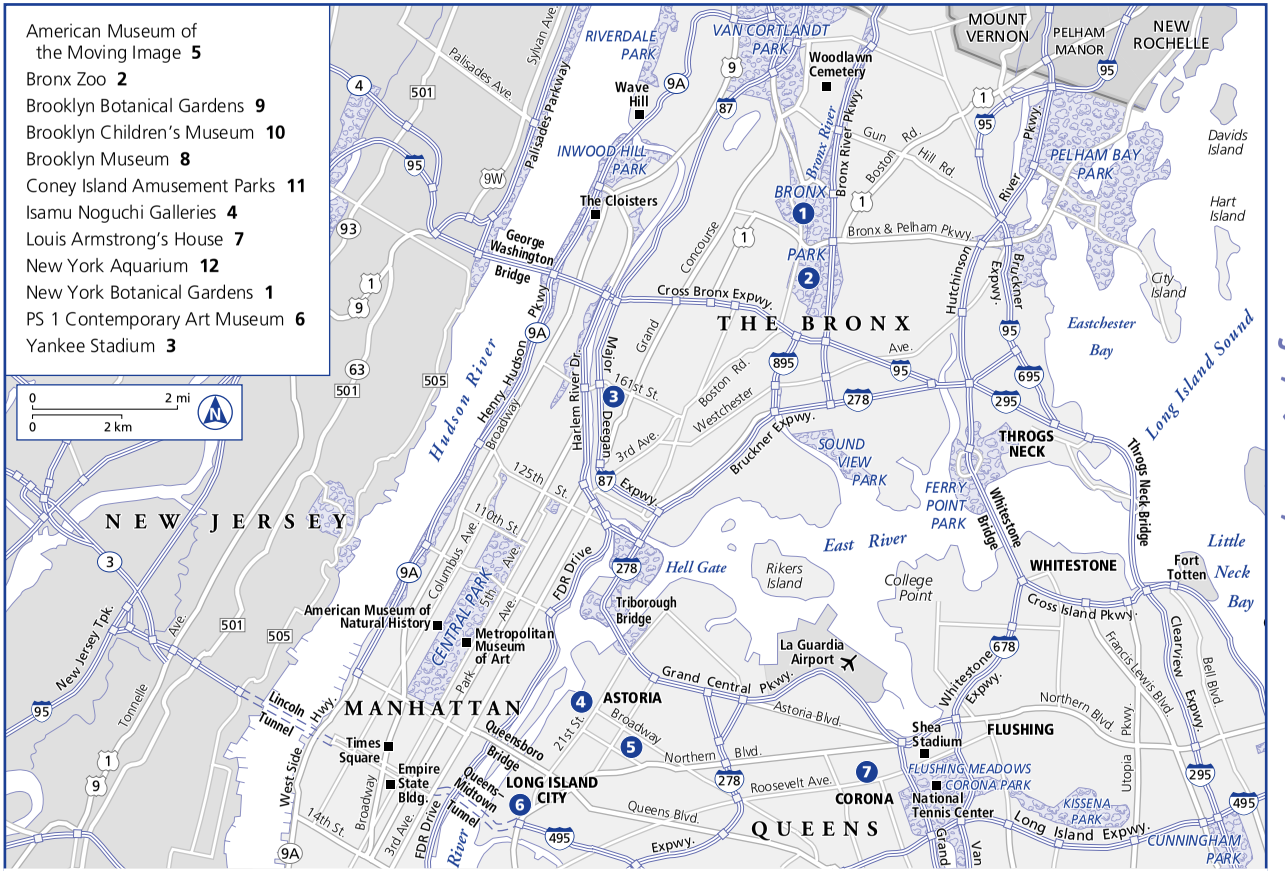
THE 12 RUNNERS-UP TO THE ICONIC SIGHTS

Twelve institutions just barely miss inclusion on the list of places you simply have to visit when in town. But each one can add a special dimension to your New York visit. If you have the time, try to supplement the 12 iconic sights with these 12 runners-up.

A ROBBER BARON'S LEGACY: Arguably the best small museum in the nation, the **Frick Collection** ★★★ (1 E. 70th St., at Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/288-0700; www.frick.org; $12 adults, $8 seniors, $5 students; children under 10 not admitted, those under 16 must be chaperoned; Tues–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun 1–6pm; 6 to 67th St.) provides a deeply satisfying experience on a number of levels. There's the highbrow fun of seeing some of the world's greatest masterpieces, the lowbrow kick of getting a firsthand peek at the home of one of the superrich and famous, and the somewhat macabre thrill, akin to a séance in a way, of communing with someone long dead through his choices in art. In the end, the Frick Collection is as much about Henry Clay Frick and the world he created as it is about the art itself.

And that's a good thing, as Frick (1849–1919) was a fascinating figure, an entrepreneur in the steel and coke industries with only 3 years of formal schooling, who became a self-made millionaire by the time he was 30. In some ways the typical "Robber Baron" (his violent methods for strike-breaking resulted in a number of deaths and injuries), he was nonetheless influenced by his friendship with Isabella Gardner (of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston) to try and do a little bit of good for the common man after his death. So he bequeathed his enormous art collection and the grandly colonnaded neoclassical mansion that housed it (built by Carrere and Hastings, architects of the N.Y. Public Library) to

Attractions in Brooklyn, Queens, & the Bronx



BROOKLYN
QUEENS
STATEN ISLAND
GREENPOINT
WILLIAMSBURG
MASPETH
BROOKLYN NAVY YARD
BROOKLYN HEIGHTS
FORT GREENE
CARROLL GARDENS
RED HOOK
PARK SLOPE
PROSPECT HEIGHTS
BEDFORD-STUYVESANT
BUSHWICK
CROWN HEIGHTS
EAST NEW YORK
OZONE PARK
JAMAICA
KEW GARDENS
FOREST PARK
HOWARD BEACH
CANARSIE
FLATBUSH
SUNSET PARK
BAY RIDGE
BENSONHURST
GRAVESEND
SHEEPSHEAD BAY
BRIGHTON BEACH
CONEY ISLAND
FORT HAMILTON
NEW YORK NAVAL STATION
LIBERTY STATE PARK
Ellis Island
Liberty Island
Statue of Liberty
Governors Island
Upper New York Bay
Lower New York Bay
Hoffman I.
Swinburne I.
GATEWAY N.R.A.
PROSPECT PARK
Greenwood Cemetery
Aqueduct Racetrack
John F. Kennedy International Airport
JAMAICA BAY WILDLIFE REFUGE
GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
Jamaica Bay
Rockaway Inlet
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Far Rockaway
Belle Harbor
World Trade Center Site
Staten Island Ferry Terminal
Ferry
Holland Tunnel
Canal St.
Houston St.
East
Williamsburg Bridge
Brooklyn-Queens
Long Island Expwy.
Grand St.
Metropolitan Ave.
Queens Blvd
Woodhaven Blvd.
Central Pkwy.
Wyck Expwy.
Union Tpk.
Grand Central Pkwy.
Hillside Ave.
Jamaica Ave.
Manhattan Br.
Brooklyn Bridge
Battery Park
Bklyn-Battery Tunnel
Flushing Ave.
Myrtle Ave.
Bushwick Ave.
Jackie Robinson Pkwy.
Jamaica Ave.
Atlantic Ave.
Rockaway Blvd.
Conduit Ave.
Pitkin Ave.
Eastern Pkwy.
Flatbush Ave.
4th Ave.
Prospect Expwy.
Gowanus Expwy.
Linden Blvd.
Pennsylvania Ave.
Nassau Expwy.
Southern Pkwy.
Van Wyck Expwy.
Merrick Blvd.
Rockaway Blvd.
Kings Hwy.
Rockaway Ave.
Flatlands Ave.
Belt Pkwy.
Cross Bay Blvd.
Shore Pkwy.
Ft. Hamilton Pkwy.
New Utrecht Ave.
Ocean Pkwy.
Ocean Ave.
Bay Pkwy.
86th St.
Cropsey Ave.
Ave. U
Ave. X
Capodanno Blvd.
Verrazano Narrows Bridge
Ocean Ave.
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495
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the formation of a public museum for the purpose of "encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts" in the United States.

It's not a large museum, but in each of the16 galleries there are wonders to behold, paintings and sculptures from nearly every great artist in the Western Canon. Because Frick wanted viewers to have their own experiences of the art, there is very little wall text posted (which makes the collection feel more like a home than an institution), nor is the art arranged in any "instructive" manner—different periods of art are mixed together, as are artists of various nationalities. Unlike the Barnes Collection in Philadelphia, Frick gave his trustees the right to change the arrangement of the works, and acquire new ones; a full third of what you'll see here was purchased after Frick passed away.

But most of the great pieces are from Frick's era and they are a testament to his astute taste as a collector. This is a man who not only collected Rembrandts (a trifecta of them!) but chose none but the most intriguing works, such as the painter's portrait of fur merchant Nicholas Ruts, Rembrandt's first commissioned portrait and the one that launched his career. Showing an edgy, dignified, intelligent-looking man wrapped in the softest, furriest ermine (look at it closely, many of the brush strokes are thinner than a hair), it's clear why Frick would have chosen it: As critic Simon Schama notes, it's one of the greatest renderings of a "businessman as hero" (and what self-made millionaire wouldn't want that in his home?). Rembrandt's self-portrait of 1658 is another transcendent pick, painted when the artist was at the lowest point in his life, having been excommunicated by the Church, financially bankrupted, and written off by the arts community. But instead of portraying himself as a failure, there's a challenge in his gaze and an upright quality to his carriage that seems to say "Make my day." You may just laugh out loud when you see it. Both works are in the West Gallery.

Masterpieces by Vermeer (3 of the meager 36 that still exist today), Renoir, Degas, Velazquez, van Eyck, Brueghel, Whistler, Pierro della Francesca, Fra Filippo Lippi, Ingres, Frans Hals, El Greco (his *St. Jerome,* of which the Metropolitan Museum's version is a copy*),* Gainsborough, Fragonard, David, Cimabue, and more, are also on view. The most famous painting in the collection, Holbein's portrait of Sir Thomas More, hangs next to the mantel in the Living Hall, though in an ironic move, Frick also hung Holbein's portrait of Thomas Cromwell—More's longtime political rival, who was also executed by Henry VIII—on the other side of that mantel, so that the two can stare each other down through eternity.

An erudite audio tour, free with admission, serves as a pleasant companion for a walk through the museum. Every hour on the half-hour, a short but interesting movie on the life of Frick is screened. And if you have the foresight, you may wish to visit the Frick website to learn if a classical music concert will be taking place during your time in New York—the collection has a history of hosting some of the best up-and-coming talents.

THE HOME-GROWN ART OF AMERICA: "The Whitney"—you utter those two words with respect. Artists coming up in the world dream of having their work displayed at the **Whitney Museum** ★★★ (945 Madison Ave., at 45th St.; ☎ 800/WHITNEY; www.whitney.org; $11 adults, $9.50 students and seniors, free Fri between 6 and 9pm; Wed–Thurs and Sat–Sun 11am–6pm, Fri 11am–9pm). Art

aficionados consider the curatorial work done here to be the most intellectually rigorous, risky, and exciting of any in the city. And over the years, a number of artists discovered by this institution—Alexander Calder, Edward Hopper, Georgia O'Keeffe, and others—have gone on to create works that then entered the canon of American art. Yet if you ask the average tourist about the museum, most won't even know it exists.

Which is a tremendous shame, because this institution, the only major museum in New York devoted to collecting *only* American fine art, consistently puts on astonishing shows. In 2005, for example, it assembled a team of experts to create a "floating island" filled with trees and shrubs that would circle Manhattan, a piece dreamed up by the now-deceased artist Robert Smithson. The Whitney, with the aid of Smithson's widow, made that dream a reality, timing it to coincide with a retrospective of Smithson's work, and for 3 weeks city dwellers bore witness to a floating mirage in the Hudson River—a tiny wedge of Illyria pulled by a tugboat.

Every 2 years the Whitney pushes the envelope even further, hosting its famed **Biennial,** a show of the best American art of the past 2 years. Curators scour the country for artists in every medium—sculpture, painting, video, installations, you name it—mixing the work of established artists with that of newcomers (whose careers are made by being picked). "Love it, hate it, see it" was the slogan for 2004, and that pretty much covers the experience. Many pieces will have been shipped elsewhere by the time you read this (such as Eve Sussman's video re-creation of Velazquez's *Las Meninas* in 2004), and other remaining works are just plain weird, but the certainty that you're bound to see something that will one day be in art history books is intoxicating.

Along with these changing exhibits (which usually take up two-thirds of the space at the museum), the Whitney showcases its fine permanent collection of American works on the fifth and second floors. Here you'll find the many mournful works by Edward Hopper (who always insisted—in vain—that his paintings were not meant to have emotional content); the desert-scoured paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe; the intricate, undulating sculptures of Louise Nevelson; and my favorite, Calder's famed *Circus* on the mezzanine level, a one-ring wonder with tiny circus figures made of wire, fabric, cork, and thread, accompanied by a video of the artist gleefully making the sculpture "perform." Calder's magical mobiles, a type of sculpture that didn't exist until he dreamt it up (marrying sculpture with movement for the first time), are a highlight of the top floor.

(***Note to parents:*** If you're visiting with kids, take them first to the *Circus* and then to the stairwell between the second and third floors. There you'll see a tiny adobe city by artist Charles Simonds. Walk down to the window and see if the kids can spot the "sister city" on the bank building across the street from the museum.)

On the basement level is a lovely cafe, with many salad and sandwich choices (the soups are also a real treat here) and a gift shop stuffed with chic, expensive items. The Whitney has a satellite gallery, the **Whitney Museum of American Arts at Altria,** on 42nd Street, just across from Grand Central Station.

TWO CENTURIES OF AMERICANA: Across the park from the Whitney sits the **New-York Historical Society** ★ (170 Central Park West, at 79th St.; ☎ 212/873-3400; www.nyhistory.org; $10 adults, $5 students and seniors; Tues–Sun

10am–6pm, Fri until 8pm; B, C to 81st St.), which must have the most misleading name of any institution in New York. First off, this is a full-blown museum with four floors of immense exhibition halls, not some sort of private society. More importantly, the museum's gaze extends far beyond New York as it displays one of the oldest collections of Americana in the country, which it started amassing in1804 (the only other institution doing so at the time was the Massachusetts Antiquarian Society). It has pieces of unequaled importance from all parts of the United States, including one of the largest collection of Tiffany lamps in the nation (135 of them, all on view); Gilbert Stuart portraits of George Washington; the largest collection in the world of paintings from the Hudson Valley School; hundreds of Audubon prints; and a huge store of artifacts from the Gold Rush. These are all housed on the fourth floor in the Luce Center, an innovative open-storage facility of glass exhibition cases in which literally 70% of the Society's collection is on view. And though it can be daunting to muddle through case after case of, say, historic silver urns, jewelry, children's toys, or portrait busts, the free audio tour is helpful in pinpointing the gems of the collection. "We're a living *Antiques Roadshow,*" says the Society's Public Historian Kathleen Hulser. "The kind of charge you can get ransacking your own attic, you can also get by ransacking the city's attic."

The most interesting pieces, to my mind, are to be found in the case just in front of you and to the right as you enter the Luce center. It holds a number of relics, from FDR's leg brace to the chair George Washington sat in at his inauguration to pieces taken from the World Trade Center site in the months after the attack. And don't miss the large model bust that sculptor Daniel Chester French created in preparation for the Lincoln Monument. It's a buzz to gaze directly into the penetrating eyes of that great work; walk left from the entranceway to find it.

On the first two floors, the Society houses changing exhibits on a number of subjects, usually pairing a lighter topic with one of more substance. Exhibits planned for 2006 and 2007 include a large retrospective of the works of Louis Comfort Tiffany; a comparison piece on the American, French, and Haitian revolutions; and an exhibition on Grant and Lee during the Civil War years.

THE STUFF OF DESIGN: Architect Mies van der Rohe famously said, "God is in the details." That could be the motto for the **Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum** ★ (2 E. 91st St., at Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/849-8400; http://ndm.si.edu; $10 adults, $7 students and seniors; Mon–Thur 10am–5pm, Fri 10am–9pm, Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.), which has made a name for itself by taking simple subjects in the world of design—say cutlery or superstrong textiles, to note two recent exhibits—and dissecting them to the point not of exasperation, but of fascination. The textiles exhibit, for example, showcased what looked like crocheted bags that are actually used in reconstructive heart surgery, entire fabric-covered kayaks that weigh less than 20 pounds, the materials used in spacesuits, and artistically strung netting used to stop soil erosion. Because the Cooper-Hewitt, which is a branch of the Smithsonian, is the only design museum in the nation to cover both contemporary and traditional design, its exhibits have a breadth and depth that are quite unusual for this type of subject matter.

The collections—textiles; wall coverings; product design and decorative arts; and drawings, prints, and graphic design—are housed in steel baron Andrew

Carnegie's former home, a two-story mansion with a grand central staircase, elaborately carved wooden paneling, and 9,000 feet of exhibition space (plus a chichi gift shop). There are no permanent exhibitions; instead, pieces from the 250,000-object collection are removed from storage based on the subject matter of the show. Be sure to check the website before you appear, as the museum tends to host facility-wide shows, meaning that for 6 weeks or so a year, the museum goes dark while the next exhibit is being installed.

A JOURNEY BACK TO THE MIDDLE AGES: Of the four museums in upper Manhattan, one towers above the rest, making it more than worthy of the sometimes hour-long trek it takes to get there. I'm speaking of **The Cloisters** ★★ (Fort Tryon Park; ☎ 212/923-3700; www.metmuseum.org; suggested donation $15; Tues–Sun 9:30am–5:15pm Mar–Oct, 9:30am–4:45pm rest of year; Ⓐ to 190th St.), the only museum in the United States devoted wholly to medieval art and one that not only displays masterpieces of that era, but does so in a setting that appears to have been airlifted, utterly intact, from some remote corner of the Pyrenees, or from a castle-bound town in Bavaria.

Opened in 1934, the museum was, in fact, constructed in the United States, but 30% of the architectural elements—columns, pedestals, naves, door frames, exquisite stained-glass windows—were salvaged from medieval European structures. It's a stunning mirage—even the land across the river was bought by patron John D. Rockefeller to thwart development and ensure that the Cloisters' views would forever have a medieval face. At its heart are four cloisters, ancient garden areas centered with a fountain and surrounded by covered walkways of the type that appear in every monastery and abbey in Europe. Off these tranquil, lovely gardens are galleries devoted to different periods of art and architecture—a peak-ceilinged Gothic chapel here, a squat, square Romanesque-era hall there—each housing the treasures of that time period.

Though you can see the entire museum in a bit over an hour, pay special attention to the Unicorn Tapestries, one of only two full sets with a unicorn theme in the world (the other's in Paris). These richly detailed tapestries can be enjoyed on a number of levels today, just as they were back then. Many scholars see the unicorn as a symbol of Christ, and the hunt to slay it as evocative of the Passion. Others write that the work is a metaphor for courtly love, with the hunt itself courtship, and the last tapestry of the unicorn trapped inside a wedding-ring-like fence symbolizing marriage (despite this captivity, the unicorn does look happy). Whatever you decide, they are strikingly beautiful, an evocative slice of the past, when nobles only hunted in packs of six, and unicorns were thought to be real (hence the long Narwhale tooth next to the fireplace in this room, which medieval men thought came from unicorns).

The other examples of must-see art are kept in the climate-controlled Campin Room (bring a sweater), where you'll view Robert de Campin's breakthrough Merode altarpiece (c. 1425), which placed the Annunciation—the moment when the Virgin Mary is informed by the angel that she will be bearing the child of God—in a secular setting rather than a church. It's also quite dramatic for its use of Jewish objects, including a prayer shawl and a vase with Hebrew-looking lettering, to establish Mary's background. To the right diagonal of the triptych is the so-called Cloisters Cross, another highlight; it's one of only three ivory crosses

from the 12th century and the most complex of the three, with over 90 figures and inscriptions painstakingly carved into the unyielding walrus-tusk ivory.

I highly recommend timing your tour to coincide with one of the curator-led gallery talks or garden walks (usually held midday); they're absolutely worthwhile.

SELF-TAUGHT SAVANTS: You'll be surprised by the powerful impact the **American Folk Art Museum** ★★ kids (45 W. 53rd St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/265-1040; www.folkartmuseum.org; $9 adults, $7 seniors and students, free after 5:30pm on Fri; Tues–Thurs 10:30am–5:30pm, Fri 10:30am–7:30pm; E, V to Fifth Ave.) makes. Dedicated to "self-taught" artists, the museum weaves its spell in much the same way Scheherazade did: by telling odd, intriguing, haunting stories. These stories—bits of history, personal history, and anthropology, really—are told through sculpture, paintings, weather vanes, quilts, painted furniture, collages, and the most entertaining wall text of any museum in the city. You may, for example, view the sketchbook of a Civil War–era prisoner of war or a "Freedom Quilt" harkening back to the legendary "Underground Railroad quilts" that may have had routes to freedom imbedded in their patterns. Visit the fifth floor and you'll see the kooky but beautiful *Gold Tower* of Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, created entirely from the turkey and chicken wings he ate at local fast food restaurants (monetary problems kept him from being able to afford more traditional sculptural materials). Also on floor 5 is a phantasmagorical paper mural by Henry Darger, who spun his nightmares and obsession with his adopted sister into a series of disturbing novels with accompanying watercolors (à la William Blake) featuring poignant, odd subjects—hermaphrodite children, strangely frozen soldiers, and doll-like girl warriors.

It's great fun, and because the museum usually organizes its exhibits by theme, you'll see works from all eras, in all mediums, in one room, which helps with the "museum fatigue" some visitors experience after seeing too many Impressionist paintings in a row, or room after room of ancient Greek statuary.

With just four floors (start at the top where the permanent collection is housed), you can see the whole shebang in less than 2 hours, meaning that a visit here could be easily paired with a visit to the Museum of Modern Art right next door. There are numerous classes and tours for children, and those who visit in between these programs should request a copy of the "scavenger hunt" of animals in the museum, an engrossing activity for children between the ages of 5 and 11. A small cafe and gift shop are housed respectively on the second and first floors.

WAR—UNDER THE SEA AND IN THE AIR: The only tourable nuclear submarine in the world, an assortment of grounded jets, and a World War II–era aircraft carrier make up the attractions at the **Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum** ★★ (Pier 86 at W. 46th St., off Twelfth Ave.; ☎ 212/245-0072; www.intrepidmuseum.org; $17 adults; $13 veterans, reservists, seniors, and students; $12 ages 6–17; $4.50 ages 2–5; 50% discount for persons with disabilities; Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm; A, C, E to 42nd St.). It's quite a lineup and one that's guaranteed to engage the attentions and imaginations of visitors of all ages.

You'll want to begin your visit at the USS *Growler* submarine, built in 1958 and so narrow that only small groups can enter at a time (which keeps the lines here long). You'll be taken on a brief, thrillingly claustrophobic tour introduced by a short video. Children under the age of 6 are not admitted.

Next, make your way to the Concorde, the oversized luxury lawn dart that, after flying half-empty for a number of years, was finally taken out of commission in 2003. (The jet isn't in the classic bent-nosed pose; that was only used for take-offs and landings.) This ultradeluxe flying bus carried a mere 100 passengers at a time, most of them paying $6,000 each way for the privilege of crossing the Atlantic faster than the speed of sound (it went from 0 to 165mph in just 2.5 seconds). Take a close look at places A and B, the seats reserved for Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip of Great Britain. If you have time, you may also want to take in the small dock museum on the history of jet travel to your right as you exit the jet.

The "Fighting I," the main focus of your visit, is a 40,000-ton aircraft carrier that had one of the greatest survival stories of World War II. Though it was hit by five kamikaze planes (two of them in a single day) during its tours of duty, it continued to serve (the Japanese called it "The Ghost Ship" because it couldn't be sunk). Go directly to the Information Center on the hangar deck to inquire if there's a tour starting anytime soon. You can wander through the ship on your own, but you'll get more out of the experience with the hour-long guided tour, led by highly informed docents, most with military backgrounds. They'll take you through the World War II planes stored on this deck (take a look, too, at the Revolutionary War version of a submarine) and the planes on the flight deck, such as the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom, the most widely used plane during the Vietnam war, and the "Tomcat," which you may remember from the movie *Top Gun*. The tour guide will also explain how the crew navigated and docked the boat, the procedures for briefings before missions, even mess-hall etiquette.

I also recommend the 25-minute-long video detailing the history of the ship (interviewed on it is U.S. Sen. John McCain, who served aboard the *Intrepid*), which starts every half-hour, and the "Intrepid Experience," which begins on the hour, and is a sound, smoke, and video re-creation of what it would have been like to be aboard the ship when it was attacked by a kamikaze fighter. For those who like interactive exhibits, there are two nausea-inducing (for me anyway) space and flight simulators (for a small extra charge).

All in all, your visit to the *Intrepid* should last 2 hours, though you could easily spend double that amount of time here.

COPS ON THE BEAT: The New York City Police Museum ★★ (100 Old Slip, between Water and South sts.; ☎ 212/480-3100; www.nypolicemuseum.org; suggested donation $4; Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm; 4, 5 to Bowling Green, 2, 3 to Wall St., or R, O to Whitehall St.) packs an emotional and intellectual wallop because it, more directly than any other museum in the city (at the time of this writing), deals with the events of 9/11 in an intricate, thoughtful manner. The museum was being created at the time of the attacks; it opened just 6 months later, and many of the exhibits conclude with a bit of information that will pull you directly back into that harrowing time. You'll read, for example, of how cadets were pulled out of the police academy to patrol the streets or how overwhelmed 911 operators waded through the torrent of frantic phone calls, both on the day itself and in the weeks that followed.

Start your visit on the top floor at the 9/11 exhibit (on the right as you enter), which profiles the actions of two officers who died on that day. Video of the attack accompanies this exhibit, so if you're traveling with small children you may

Chelsea Calling: Meet the New SoHo

In the past decade, more than 250 galleries have moved onto the blocks spanning 20th to 29th streets between Tenth and Eleventh avenues in West Chelsea, effectively making the Big Apple the planet's premiere marketplace for contemporary art. Gallery after gallery has taken over the former warehouse and industrial spaces of this dusty old 'hood, creating an eminently walkable new arts district.

Although you can have a perfectly lovely time getting lost in the area, you could hit a lot of clunker exhibitions (some are better than others). A better tack might be to catch a tour of the area (see below) or to concentrate on the following 10 galleries, which have made their reputations with consistently thought-provoking shows.

Note: The standard schedule for all of these galleries is Sept–May Tues–Sat 10am–6pm; and June–Aug Mon–Fri 10am–6pm. Your best subway option for all of the listed galleries is to take either the C or E to 23rd St.

- **303 Gallery** (525 W. 22nd St.; ☎ 212/255-1121; www.303gallery.com). The Whitney biennial has come calling recently, picking up the works of the young to midcareer, cutting-edge photographers and painters who present shows here. Visit the website first for a look.
- **Paula Cooper** (534 W. 21st St. and 521 W. 21st St.; ☎ 212/255-1105). Cooper used to be one of the biggest names in art. Though she's lost some of her big-name clients, she still has the exquisite taste she's always had, and exhibits a number of prominent artists, including: Jennifer Bartlett, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, and Andres Serrano.
- **Gagosian** (555 W. 24th St.; ☎ 212/741-1111; www.gagosian.com). A massive, important family of galleries (one uptown, one in Los Angeles, another in London), it presents blockbuster shows of works from such major 20th- and 21st-century figures as Roy Lichtenstein, Francis Bacon, Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman, and Cy Twombly.
- **Barbara Gladstone Gallery** (515 W. 24th St.; ☎ 212/206-9300; www.gladstonegallery.com). Come here to see the artists who have emerged as big honchos in the last 5 years or so, such as Matthew Barney, Ilya Kabakov, and Richard Prince. Gladstone tends to feature conceptual, often highly political art—most prominently photography and videos, but also sculpture and paintings.
- **Yossi Milo** (525 W. 25th St.; ☎ 212/404-0370; www.yossimilogallery.com). One of my personal favorites, Milo works almost exclusively with photographers and has a terrific eye for the next big thing. He also runs a very friendly gallery, and he and his staff are always happy to talk with interested patrons.
- **Pace Wildenstein** (534 and 545 W. 25th St.; ☎ 212/929-7000; www.pacewildenstein.com). With outposts in Chelsea and Midtown

(32 E. 57th St.), Pace Wildenstein has been a powerhouse since the 1960s. Shows in 2004 and 2005 featured the works of such biggies as Chuck Close and Robert Rauschenberg.

- **The Proposition** (559 W. 22nd St.; ☎ 212/242-0203; www.theproposition.com). A gallery geared towards the "insiders" of the art world, those engaged in the sometimes obscure dialogue of new ideas. If you're part of the game and know the lingo, you should enjoy it. If not, viewing the downright odd photos, paintings, installations, and sculptures might be a baffling experience.
- **Andrea Rosen** (525 W. 24th St.; ☎ 212/627-6000; www.andrearosengallery.com). The Rosen gallery is a terrific place to see emerging artists, especially those who are "installation happy" and like to create entire environments for their viewers. It seems that each time I come here I'm stepping into some new type of utopia (or dystopia); the experience can be chilling and exciting.
- **Sonnabend Gallery** (536 W. 22nd St.; ☎ 212/627-1018). I find that the Sonnabend has something that's missing from so many galleries: a sense of humor. Most of the work I've seen here has been purposefully funny—odd *Star Wars* sculptures, videos of Germans singing along to Madonna songs—and after all of the "serious art" at the other places, coming into this playful atmosphere is a delight.
- **David Zwirner** (525 W. 19th St.; ☎ 212/727-7020; www.davidzwirner.com). Owned by an ex-pat German, this gallery has a reputation for showing the best up-and-coming Teutonic art, some of it quite racy. This is not the place for people with delicate sensibilities, but if you don't mind seeing art that's really on the edge, you'll often find something here that will get your adrenaline pumping.
- **A gallery tour:** Allowing an expert to lead you through this ever-shifting maze of art is a good idea. And New York's foremost expert in the Chelsea Gallery scene is Raphael Risemburg of **NY Gallery Tours** ✭ (☎ 212/946-1548; www.nygallerytours.com). Risemburg, a professor at Keane College in New Jersey, has a droll, friendly manner and leads his tours in Socratic fashion: He'll tell you what he thinks of the art at the 10 to 20 galleries you cover on your tour, and then ask your opinion on the unanswered questions it poses. His open tours are offered one Saturday per month (the cost is $15, but you can get $3 off by going to the website first) and he also leads private tours for $200 (though you can bring along as many people as you like on those). If you take the group tour and a large crowd shows up, Risemburg will divide the group into gay and straight—go with the gay group (even if you aren't), and that way you'll get Risemburg himself.

wish to skip this room. Next to the 9/11 room is a space for changing exhibits, and then on the left end is the sobering "Hall of Heroes," dedicated to the 700 officers over the years who have lost their lives in the line of duty (the recorded bagpipe music and recitation of names goes on even when the museum is closed in an attempt to ensure that the sacrifices of these men and women are never forgotten).

The second floor is largely devoted to illustrating how officers do their jobs today. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has 38,000 officers plus 20,000 civilian employees, making it the largest police force in the world. To put into perspective just how gargantuan the department is, consider that the Los Angeles Police Department has just 12,000 officers and 8,000 civilians—added together, that's less than half the number of uniformed New York officers. How the NYPD's various units interact and the highly specialized nature of their jobs is explored in a series of interactive, video-taped interview/montages with current members of the force: housing police, mounted police, undercover detectives, the vice unit . . . you name it. You'll learn about the precautions an officer needs to take before entering a roof area, the types of disguises employed by subway decoys, what it's like to infiltrate a gambling ring—fascinating, in-depth depictions more interesting and inspiring than any TV drama (in fact, I left thinking, for the first time in my life, that perhaps I should consider a career change to law enforcement—you may feel the same way). To the left of this exhibit is a macabre room dedicated to mug shots, famous criminals, and all of the weapons confiscated over the years (including the first machine gun to be used in a crime, by a member of Al Capone's gang). You should allot at least 40 minutes to this floor.

The ground floor covers the different methods of transportation and communication that the force has used over the years and can be glossed over fairly quickly; you'll want to spend the majority of your time here upstairs.

REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST: Though they're located close to each other, don't try to visit the Police Museum and **The Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust** ★★ (36 Battery Place, in Battery Park City; ☎ 646/437-4200; www.mjhnyc.com; $10 adults, $7 seniors, $5 students, free admission Wed 4–8pm; Sun–Tues and Thurs 10am–5:45pm, Wed 10am–8pm, Fri and the eve of Jewish holidays 10am–5pm; 4, 5 to Bowling Green, 2, 3 to Wall St., or R, O to Whitehall St.) on the same day. Not only will you run out of time (it takes at least an hour and a half to see the Jewish Museum), but both can be emotionally draining experiences, particularly the Museum of Jewish Heritage, which deals in explicit fashion with the Holocaust. To be fair, the museum is not in any way a showcase of horrors; its curators have been very careful to create a rounded picture of what life was like before, during, and after World War II, and visitors are sent back out into New York dwelling not only on the first part of the museum's mantra—"Never forget"—but also on the vibrant lives these Jews lived and on the resilience of the Jewish people.

Your tour will begin in the older section of the museum—an elegant six-sided building by architect Kevin Roche, meant to evoke both the Star of David and the six million Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust. The first floor covers life before the war with a sensitively constructed exhibit detailing the various aspects of daily existence, from the professions Jews entered, to the various ideologies that were

popular at the time, to the rituals surrounding seasons of the year and days of the week. Each artifact shown has two stories attached to it: the explanation of what it would have been used for at that time, as well as a bit of history about the person who once owned the piece—the latter giving the whole enterprise a wonderfully personal tone.

The second floor is dedicated to the war years, and as might be expected, many of the images shown are quite graphic and disturbing. (People with children under 12 would be well-advised to skip this floor by taking the elevator directly from the 1st floor up to the 3rd.) In addition to photos, objects, and text, the museum is a repository for videos from Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation's Visual History project, and these vivid accounts of life in the camps and ghettos are the highlight of the museum.

The final floor discusses the Diaspora, with exhibitions on Jewish life in the United States, Israel, and Europe. There are also changing exhibits, and programs of lectures and music. For those looking for a very in-depth experience, there is a self-guided headphone tour (an additional $5) narrated by Meryl Streep and Itzhak Perlman. A kosher cafe rounds out the museum's offerings.

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: As narrow in its focus as the Jewish Heritage Museum is broad, the **Tenement Museum** ★★★ (108 Orchard St., off Delancey St.; 212/431-0233; www.tenement.org; $15 adults, $12 students and seniors, free for children; Mon 11am–5:30pm, Tues–Fri 11am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10:45am–6pm; Ⓑ, Ⓓ to Grand St., or Ⓕ to Delancey St.) looks at just one building on the Lower East Side. In exploring the personal histories of the people who called this tenement home between 1863 and 1935 (and there were well over 7,000 of them from 25 different countries), it is able to give a remarkably in-depth snapshot of what it must have been like to be an immigrant in New York City during that period, when the housing itself could be a hazard.

Visits to the museum are by 45-minute guided tour only, and visitors have a choice of three programs: The "Getting By" tour, which tells the dramatic tale of how two immigrant families survived the Great Depressions of the 1870s and the 1930s; the "Piecing It Together" tour, about the life of the garment industry workers of the area; and the "Confino Family Apartment," which is less tour than interactive experience in which a costumed character, teenaged Victoria Confino, instructs new immigrants (the people on the tour) in a candid, revealing, and totally improvised manner on how to get along in New York. (The last one sounds hokey, I know, but to my mind it's the most vivid of the three.) The Confino program is especially appropriate for children and seniors, as there is less walking involved (in fact, participants can sit down), visitors get to touch objects in the room, and this is the only apartment in the building that's air-conditioned (an important consideration in July and August). The Confino experience is offered on Fridays and weekends in July and August, and weekends only the rest of the year.

Choosing between the other two tours is more difficult. In the Garment District program, visitors get a peek at artifacts that were found in the building, see a small in-apartment sweatshop, and learn about the practice of "sitting Shiva" when a member of a Jewish family dies. The "Getting By" tour is pegged on the heart-rending story of the disappearance of one of the tenants in the building and how his family was able to survive without the breadwinner of their household (be

sure to ask your guide to tell the story of what happened to this man's descendents). It's possible to take both tours for $20, though there is a small amount of overlap in the topics covered.

The museum also offers walking tours of the neighborhood, between April and November each Saturday and Sunday at 1pm and 3pm ($12), and free post-tour "Kitchen Conversations" after some tours, for educators and participants to have a bit of extra time to explore the issues raised over coffee and cookies. The museum will also add an "Irish Immigrant Experience" tour, sometime in 2006.

If you visit the Tenement Museum on a Sunday or midweek, take the opportunity to stroll over to the nearby **Eldridge Street Project** ★ (12 Eldridge St., between Canal and Division sts.; www.eldridgestreet.org; Sun and Tues–Thurs 11am–3pm; $5 adults, $3 seniors and students; B, D to Grand or F to W. Broadway). It's an 1887 synagogue, the oldest house of worship in the city for Eastern European Jews, and has the kind of grandeur and beauty that you normally associate with the cathedrals of Europe. There's a poignancy to the place as well, as the building was abandoned for 40 years before restoration began in the 1990s, and it's crumbling picturesquely away in places. An hourly "From Bottom to Top" tour takes you through the history of the synagogue and the issues involved in its restoration.

FROM MAGIC LANTERN TO X-BOX: Head to the borough of Queens, more easily accessible than you'd think, for a major museum experience that must be included on any list of must-sees. For sheer, unadulterated fun, there's no museum in town that can beat the **Museum of the Moving Image** ★★★ kids (35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria; ☎ 718/784-0077; $10 adults, $7.50 students and seniors, $5 children ages 5–18; free Fri 4–8pm; Wed–Thurs noon–5pm, Fri noon–8pm, Sat–Sun 11am–6:30pm; R, V to Steinway St.). The first museum anywhere to look at TV, film, and video games together (a heretical concept when the museum was opened in 1988), it is not simply an archive of past shows, like the Museum of TV and Radio in Manhattan (p. 168). Instead, it explores the craft and technology behind these arts with startlingly imaginative interactive exhibits, commissioned art works, video sequences, and, of course, artifacts. Just how much fun is all this? Well, Citysearch ranked it the best place in the city for a family outing, and *Time Out* magazine called the museum the #1 place to go when you're "baked" (and if that doesn't hit all the bases, I don't know what does).

Start your visit on the third floor with the museum's core exhibit, "Behind the Screen," which explores the many technical issues behind moving images, from explanations of how the eye is tricked into seeing movement in rapidly repeating images, to the intricacies of sound and film editing. You'll have a chance to dub your own voice into such classics as *My Fair Lady,* create original computer animation, transmute the musical score of a famous film scene, and more. Several times a day, working editors, animators, and educators give demonstrations of how these techniques are used on actual productions.

On the second floor the focus shifts from technical issues to design issues, with exhibits devoted to the make-up, costumes, sets, and publicity stills that help create the image the director (or studio) is looking for. So you may see the rubber masks that transformed Dustin Hoffman into a very old character in the film *Little Big Man* or the dazzling costumes from the movie *Chicago.* Walls and walls of marketing ephemera—lunch boxes of the Fonz, cookie tins with the faces of

silent film stars, Muppet memorabilia—complete the floor, along with "Tut's Fever Movie Palace," a wacky '30s-style theater, created by artist Red Grooms; the theater screens classic silent serials several times a day.

And if you've been harboring a secret yen to play Galactica just one more time, you'll have your chance on the ground-floor exhibit "Digital Play: Reloaded," which pairs the classic arcade games of the '80s with their contemporary counterparts (I've known folks who've spent their entire afternoon just at this exhibit). Also on the first floor is the museum's full-sized movie theater, which offers free screenings of feature films from around the world. "We don't draw a line in the sand and say, "'This is art and this is not,'" says New Media curator Carl Goodman. "We screen it all here so we get to look at the artistic side of a commercial film, followed by an obscure art film. It gives us a much broader scope than most institutions." Screenings are often followed by discussions with the artists involved, including such big names as Glenn Close, Tim Burton, David Cronenberg, and Jennifer Connelly. For a schedule of upcoming films and talks, visit the museum's website.

OUTER BOROUGH BONANZA: Some Manhattan-centric residents downplay the remarkable **Brooklyn Museum** ★ (200 Eastern Pkwy., Brooklyn; ☎ 718/683-5000; www.brooklynmuseum.org; suggested donation $8 adults, $4 seniors and students; Wed–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 11am–6pm; ❷, ❸ to Eastern Pkwy.) as the "mini Met." It has a grand, neoclassical facade—but not quite as grand as the Metropolitan Museum's (especially now that much of it is masked behind a large, modern glass-and-steel canopy/walkway/entryway). It gets smaller crowds than the Metropolitan, meaning you can stroll through on a weekday and often have an entire gallery all to yourself. And though it covers every period in the history of art in its 560,000 square feet of galleries (on five floors), it has far fewer objects per era or region than the Met does, which dwarfs it with a whopping 2 million square feet. (An interesting aside: Its smaller size is an accident of history. The original plans by esteemed architects McKim, Meade and White called for a space 16 times as large, but when Brooklyn was annexed by New York City in 1898, funds for what was now just a borough, rather than a city museum, dried up.)

That being said, what the museum does well, it does superbly. Its Egyptian Collection, while not as big as the Met's, arguably has more masterpieces. In fact, when an ancient Egyptian piece comes up at auction, dealers often ask, "Is it Brooklyn quality?"—the Brooklyn Museum's collection being the benchmark for this sort of artifact. Among the collection's many wonders are a tiny 5,000-year-old, predynastic terra-cotta sculpture of a woman, which curators have nicknamed "Birdwoman" for her beaklike face, one of the very few intact sculptures from this long-ago era. Why she looks so much like a bird, and what the statue was used for, remains a mystery to this day. The Cartonnage of Nespanjetjerenpere is another highlight, a mummy case that looks like it was swiped from the set of *Revenge of the Mummy,* its colors electrically bright and unfaded. You'll also see here an actual mummy wrapped in linens, dozens of magnificent wall paintings, relief sculptures, and statuary. I highly recommend getting the audio tour ($3) for this gallery, as it will explain how these works were created, what the symbolism means, and what they reveal about life in ancient Egypt.

Second most popular among the museum's offerings are the Decorative Arts Galleries (on the 4th floor), which re-create important rooms from different eras of American history, including John D. Rockefeller's "Moorish Smoking Room," an extravagantly over-the-top Victorian version of the Middle East, every single bit of space lavishly carved, gilded, inlaid, or embroidered. Also worth a look are the Museum's American Collection and the Rodin Sculpture Gallery, both on the top floor. The American Collection jumbles together fine art, folk art, and decorative arts by theme rather than era, creating a dense, rich viewing experience, with works by such American masters as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, and Georgia O'Keeffe. The Rodin is one of the museum's newest acquisitions, containing modern castings of Rodin's original molds, two dozen or so, from such masterpieces as the *Burghers of Calais* and the *Gates of Hell.*

And one final thing that the Brooklyn does better than the Met: party. On the first Saturday of each month, the museum throws open its doors, hires deejays and performers of all sorts, and throws a "First Saturday" fiesta that is free to the public. Two free movies are screened and there's always a gallery talk or two by curators or visiting artists. It's usually a good time, and a great evening activity for families, as there are many kids' activities. Festivities commence at 6pm, ending at 11pm, but because many of the special activities require free tickets, which are handed out early in the evening, it's a good idea to get there at the start of the event.

MUSEUMS FOR VISITORS WITH SPECIALIZED INTERESTS

Have endless reserves of energy—and time? Or are you interested in seeing some of the city's more off-beat sights? There are two dozen other museums which will delight those with the following specialized interests.

ACADEMIC ART

A worthy stop if you're in Midtown, **Dahesh Museum** ★ (580 Madison Ave., between 57th and 58th sts.; ☎ 212/759-0606; www.daheshmuseum.org; $10 adults, $8 seniors, and $6 students; $2 discounts often available at www.nycvisit.com; Tues–Sun 11am–6pm; Ⓝ, Ⓡ to Fifth Ave.) focuses on the forgotten paintings and sculpture of the "Academic Artists"—those men and women who kept working in the classical tradition in the 19th and early 20th centuries, long after the Impressionists had made their revolutionary break with the formal styles of the day. Don't come here out of historical curiosity, though; these "dodo birds" of the art world soared high in their time, creating lustrous, rich, fascinating works of art that more than reward the viewer. Many of these works, in fact, offer engrossing peepholes into the concerns of the day, as they depict great historic events, exotic scenes of the Middle East and Asia, and richly detailed portraits of daily life—all painted with a high degree of finesse and polish. To get the full impact of what these artists achieved, try to time your visit with the free, daily 12:15pm tour. This single-floor museum can be seen in an hour or less; visit the website to learn about special lectures and tours.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN, CARIBBEAN & HISPANIC ART

Though it's not a large museum, **The Studio Museum in Harlem** (144 W. 125th St., between Lenox Ave. and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.; ☎ 212/864-4500; www.studiomuseum.org; suggested donation $7 adults, $3 students and seniors; Wed–Fri and Sun noon–6pm, Sat 10am–6pm; 2, 3 to 125th St.) is one of the most respected in Gotham, known for presenting challenging, intricate shows of African-American and Caribbean-American art (contemporary and from the 19th and 20th centuries). In addition to two floors of galleries that host changing exhibitions, there's a space right off the lobby for the semipermanent "Postcards from Harlem" wall, on which famous artists share their own memories of the neighborhood through text, photography, paintings, and drawings.

Uptown, on the East Side, **El Museo del Barrio** (1230 Fifth Ave., at 104th St.; ☎ 212/831-7272; www.elmuseo.org; $6 adults, $4 seniors and students, except Thurs, when seniors are free; Wed–Sun 11am–5pm; 6 to 103rd St.) serves as a showplace for the art of Latin America and the Caribbean. Among its collections are hundreds of pre-Columbian pieces, contemporary and modern paintings and sculptures, and, most significantly, 500 Santos de Palo, mostly from Puerto Rico. These hand-carved, wooden saints are very beautiful and well worth a visit. The museum also throws fun parties for every Latin and Caribbean holiday, and hosts changing exhibits that vary in interest.

AUSTRIAN & GERMAN ART

The Neue Gallery (1048 Fifth Ave., entrance on 86th St.; ☎ 212/628-6200; www.neuegallery.org; $10 adults, $7 students and seniors; open Sat–Mon 11am–6pm, Fri 11am–9pm; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.) is most notable for its five jewel-toned paintings by Gustave Klimt, its "Didn't I sit on that in the '70s?" Bauhaus furniture, and its collection of drawings by such Teutonic masters as Dix, Schiele, and Klimt. Because some of these drawings are a bit racy, children under the age of 12 are not admitted, and those 16 and younger must be accompanied by an adult. Also on-site: a Viennese cafe (p. 113), a small theater for lectures and films, and a pricey gift shop.

CHINESE-AMERICAN HISTORY

A two-room museum in a Chinatown cultural center, **The Museum of Chinese in the Americas** (70 Mulberry St., at Bayard; ☎ 212/619-4785; www.moca-nyc.com; $3 adults, $1 students and seniors; Tues–Thurs and Sat–Sun noon–6pm, Fri noon–7pm; 6, R, Q to Canal St.) is the only one of its kind in the world. It displays its collection of ethnic artifacts in changing exhibits, which are sometimes interesting and sometimes, well, dull. Not worth a special trip, unless you have a deep interest in this subject.

COLONIAL, REVOLUTIONARY & EARLY AMERICAN NEW YORK

Far uptown in Harlem, and looking like it should be in the midst of some grand Virginia estate, **Morris Jumel Mansion** (65 Jumel Terrace, between 161st and 162nd sts.; ☎ 212/923-8008; www.morrisjumel.org; $4 adults, $3 seniors; Wed–Sun 10am–4pm; C to 163rd St.) served briefly as George Washington's headquarters

during the Revolutionary War. Built in 1765, it was later bought by French immigrant Morris Jumel and his wife (who became the wife of Vice President Aaron Burr after Jumel's death) and is furnished with Second Empire and Colonial furnishings of the type the Jumels would have had. While the house has an interesting history, the lack of original furnishings and guided tours reduces its appeal, making it a must-visit only for die-hard American Revolution aficionados.

Mount Vernon Hotel Museum and Garden (421 E. 61st St., between First Ave. and York St.; ☎ 212/838-6878; www.mvhm.org; $8 adults, $7 seniors and students; Tues–Sun 11am–4pm; 4, 5, 6, N, R to 59th St.) is a better historical house experience, thanks to the talents of the guides who lead visitors through this 1799 carriage home. Attached at first to a country manor, it became a fashionable resort hotel in 1826. The story of that hotel and life in the 1820s and '30s make up the bulk of the tour. The fact that this little house still exists among the high-rises of Midtown, and that there's a tranquil garden where you can retreat and regroup, gives the museum special appeal.

Fraunces Tavern (54 Pearl St., near Stone St.; ☎ 212/425-1776; www.frauncestavernmuseum.org; $4 for adults, $3 for seniors and students; Tues–Fri noon–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm; R, 0 to Whitehall, or 4, 5 to Bowling Green) is a site that some will enjoy. Probably more notable for what happened on its premises than what the museum actually houses, this is the famed watering hole where the Sons of Liberty planned their moves against the British, where George Washington bade farewell to his troops, and where Alexander Hamilton toiled (with his small staff) as the first Secretary of the Treasury for 2 years. The highlight is the "Long Room," a re-creation of the dining hall where Washington gave his famous farewell. Look for the handwritten diary, on the third floor, in which one of his generals gives an account of that emotional dinner; in a case diagonally across from the diary, you'll see an actual lock of the great man's hair (he was a redhead!). The museum is administered by the Sons of the Revolution and contains a number of Revolutionary War paintings and memorabilia. On the website you'll also find information about weekly history programs.

You may want to pair your visit to Fraunces Tavern with nearby **Federal Hall** (26 Wall St., off Broad St.; ☎ 212/825-6990; www.nps.gov/feha; no information currently available on hours or admission fees; R, 0 to Whitehall St. or 4, 5 to Bowling Green). Closed in the months after 9/11, as the seismic impact of the towers falling caused serious cracks in its infrastructure, this severe Greek temple–like structure stands on the site where George Washington took the oath of office, the Congressional Congress passed the Bill of Rights, and, much earlier, the Peter Zinger trial established de facto freedom of the press in Colonial America (and may have hastened the Revolution thanks to the incendiary articles the press started writing after that time). Inside you'll find a grandly ornamental rotunda, and two floors of exhibits chronicling all of the important events that took place here. ***Note:*** The building was still closed for renovations at press time and probably won't reopen before the end of 2006.

DECORATIVE ARTS

Just across the street from the Museum of Modern Art, **The Museum of Arts and Design** ★ (40 W. 53rd St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/956-3535; www.madmuseum.org; $9 adults, $7 students and seniors, free Thurs 6–8pm;

Fri–Wed 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–8pm; E, V to Fifth Ave.) is only now recovering from a decades-long identity crisis. Formerly known as the American Craft Museum, it never showcased only American works, nor did it restrict itself to crafts. Instead, the museum's mandate has always been to collect and display contemporary decorative arts (objects that are part of our everyday lives) from around the world and has done so with vigor, creating exhibits that are at once aesthetically pleasing and instructive, focusing on the interaction between materials and technique. "We want visitors to leave with a new curiosity of how things are put together," says Chief Curator David McFadden. The museum is on the cusp of being able to achieve this goal even more consistently thanks to a planned move in late 2007 to a much larger space on Columbus Circle, which will allow it to house permanent exhibits. Until then, it will focus on such changing exhibits as Droog Design (on the Dutch collective that uses only recycled or low-cost materials in its work), *Schmuck 2006* (a juried contemporary jewelry exhibit), and "The Eames Lounge Chair: the Evolution of a Modernist Icon."

HIMALAYAN ART

Travelers who need a break from the bustle and stresses of New York can escape to **The Rubin Museum** ✦ (150 W. 17th St., between Sixth and Seventh aves.; ☎ 212/620-5000; $7 adults, $5 students and seniors; Tues and Sat 11am–7pm, Wed 11am–5pm, Thurs–Fri 11am–9pm, Sun 11am–6pm; 1 to 18th St.), a serene, contemplative museum of art from the Himalayas. Secular in origin—the museum was founded by an American millionaire and his wife who fell in love with the art of this region—its effect is nonetheless tremendously spiritual, as the paintings, drawings, sculptures, and artifacts shown are all religious items, many used by traveling monks to teach Buddhism or to help worshippers deepen their meditation (that's why so many of the works are done on fabric—they're meant to be rolled up and carried). Many tell the stories of the various Buddhas, portraying meditating men with halos, snarling demons, teachers, and commoners in the deepest blues, ruby reds, emerald greens, and dazzling golds. For sheer beauty, the 1,500 works housed in this museum are hard to top.

The museum itself is one of the youngest in the city, opened in October 2004 on the site of the former Barney's Department Store (the Rubins chose it because the central circular stairway looked like a "mandala," a never-ending circle surrounded by a square which is the Tantric Buddhist diagram of the cosmos). Programs are held each weekend for children, and the museum even trains teens to lead other teens on tours. There are also lectures, musical performances, and a Saturday night "Cinema Cabaret" each week, where patrons can sip wine, dine, and watch a Hollywood movie that has some connection—sometimes tenuous—to the Himalayas. The only disappointment here is the audio guides, which are free with admission but poorly done. Don't waste your time with them; instead, ask questions of the extremely knowledgeable guides, wearing big red ASK ME buttons, on each floor.

HISTORIC HOMES

New York City has never been very good at preserving its past (perhaps we have too little room . . . or patience), but on East 4th Street one precious sliver of the Victorian era has survived utterly intact. Called **The Merchants House Museum**

(29 E. 4th St., between Bowery and Lafayette sts.; ☎ 212/777-1089; www.merchantshouse.com; $8 adults, $5 seniors and students; Thurs–Mon noon–5pm; 6 to Bleeker, R, Q to 8th St.), this handsome Greek Revival town house was once the home of the Tredwell family, who furnished it in the highest style of the day, all mohair couches, crystal chandeliers, and deep red curtains. These furnishings, the clothing of the 10-person family, their cookware, and anything else you might want to see, are all on display thanks to the efforts in 1936 of a preservationist (before there really was such a thing) named George Chapman, who had the foresight to buy the house and then safeguard it as it was (some of the rooms have been restored back to their mid-1800s look). A lovely garden and frequent ghost sightings add to the home's appeal. It's a good stop for history buffs, as this is the *only* Victorian-era house in New York City preserved intact, both inside and out.

Close to a mile uptown from the Merchant House, we have the **Birthplace of Teddy Roosevelt** (28 E. 20th St., between Broadway and Park Avenue South; ☎ 212/260-1616; www.nps.gov/thrb; $3 adults; Tues–Sat 9am–5pm, tours on the hour; R, Q to 23rd St.). While it's a delight to see his original Rough Riders uniform and the many family portraits and photographs in the two gallery spaces, the house itself is not the place where T.R. was born (that was torn down and replaced by this copy), and only about 20% of the furniture in the five period rooms is original. The last time I visited, the ranger who was guarding the site seemed surprised to see a visitor and had to hastily run through the museum turning on the lights so that I could see the place. For die-hard Roosevelt fans only.

My personal favorite among the historic bunch would have to be the **Louis Armstrong House and Museum** ★ (34–56 107th St. in Corona, Queens; ☎ 718/478-8274; www.satchmo.net; $8 adults; $6 seniors, students, and children; Tues–Sat 10am–4pm, Sat–Sun noon–4pm; 7 to 103rd St.), a visitor experience as gracious, warm, and intriguing as the man himself, thanks to the marvelous guides (all ex-musicians and jazz historians) who lead visitors through the home. The only house that this traveling musician ever owned, it was perfectly preserved after the death of his wife Lucille in 1983 (Armstrong himself passed away in 1971), and opened to the public in 2003. The sense that someone still lives here is so eerie that you may find yourself expecting Satchmo to emerge from the kitchen, turn on the stereo, and tell a joke. In the course of your tour, you'll hear about Louis's rags-to-riches history (son of a prostitute, learned to play trumpet in the juvenile detention center, made his name in mobster-owned clubs), and see the fairly modest two-story home that he and his wife lavished with every luxury, from custom-made 24-karat bathroom fixtures—they were featured in a *Time* magazine article called "How the Other Half Bathes"—to Baccarat chandeliers and a state-of-the-art audio system. The highlight: recordings of everyday life that Armstrong made on his tape-recorder; your guide will play them as you wander through, allowing you to hear the family and visiting musicians talking, laughing, and jamming together.

TWO MORE JEWISH MUSEUMS

The "modest" goal of the **Jewish Museum** ★★ kids (1109 Fifth Ave., at 92nd St.; ☎ 212/423-3337; www.thejewishmuseum.org; $10 adults, $7.50 students and seniors, free Thurs after 5pm; Sun–Wed 11am–5:45pm, Thurs 11am–8pm, Fri 11am–3pm; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.) is to explore 4,000 years of Jewish culture

through art, and surprisingly, it succeeds much of the time. Its two-floor permanent exhibition (which starts on the 4th floor) gently guides viewers from the biblical era, and the many clashes of the day over such issues as animal sacrifice and the role of the Temple (Jesus wasn't the only one up in arms over that), through the *Diaspora,* when the Israelites, forced out of their home by successive conquerors, became "wandering Jews," spreading to every part of the known world. The modern section brings the exhibition up to today, with only the briefest of mentions of the Holocaust (if that's what interests you, you'll be better served by the Jewish Heritage Museum downtown; p. 158). The story is told through a mixed marriage, so to speak, of nearly 800 exquisite artifacts and works of art, and by a variety of storytelling devices, including a free audio tour (narrated by Leonard Nimoy among others), interactive computer programs, videos, television clips, and wall texts. What finally emerges is a portrait of a people who have not only managed to survive against the steepest of odds, but have become magnificently diverse in the process. In fact, the second half of the exhibit could be seen as a survey of world art styles as seen through Jewish eyes, making the museum of interest to a wide audience.

The fourth floor also houses a nifty playroom for kids (my daughters love it) and art classrooms. On the first and second floors are galleries for changing exhibits, which have housed blockbuster shows on Modigliani and Chagall in the past. There's also a so-so kosher cafe and two handsome gift shops.

Persons interested in tracing their Jewish ancestry can visit the **Center for Jewish History** (15 W. 16th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/924-8318; www.cjh.org; free admission; Mon–Thurs 9am–5pm, Fri 9am–3pm; 4, 5, 6, L, N, R to Union Sq., or 1 to 18th St.), which is the largest repository of Jewish records, artifacts, books, and letters in the world—100 million archived documents in all—and a state-of-the-art genealogical library open to all. Three to four temporary exhibits, drawn usually from these vast archives, are housed in three large, on-site galleries. Cultural programs are held in the small auditorium three or four times a week. The library is open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 5pm; the museum space is open Sunday through Thursday from 11am to 5pm.

NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE

National Museum of the American Indian (One Bowling Green, between State and Whitehall sts.; ☎ 212/514-3700; www.americanindian.si.edu; free admission; daily 10am–5pm, Thurs until 8pm; 4, 5 to Bowling Green, or R, O to Whitehall St.) is usually overshadowed by the American Indian Museum in Washington (the two are actually branches of the Smithsonian Institution) and often overlooked by visitors because it has no permanent collection on-site. Nevertheless, the museum plays host to a number of impressive touring exhibits (and to be truthful, a couple of duds as well). Its stated mission is to "strengthen the voice of native peoples," and to that end, it usually includes wall text along with objects created by members of the Native American nations. Next to a basket, for example, you're as likely to read a tale told by the niece of the woman who made the piece as you are some dry explanation as to what the basket is used for. Housed in the magnificent Customs House, designed by architect Cass Gilbert (see our chapter on walking tours for a complete write-up on the architecture), the museum hosts a series of performances, lectures, and courses each year in its

Pavilion Space, which opened in the spring of 2006 (go to the website for a complete list of programs).

NEW YORK CITY HISTORY

People interested in New York City history will enjoy the **Museum of the City of New York** ✯ (1220 Fifth Ave., at 103rd St.; ☎ 212/534-1672; suggested donation $7 adults; $4 students, seniors, and children; Wed–Sun noon–5pm; 6 to 103rd St.), the only cultural institution in the city that has no other purpose than to chronicle the life of the Big Apple. Its heartbeat is a masterful 25-minute video on New York history that affectingly recounts the tale of the city's growth from tiny Dutch colony to world capital. Along with rooms from historic homes, displays of children's toys, and a razzle-dazzle overview of New York theater (with costumes and photos from a number of current and past Broadway productions), the museum mounts numerous temporary exhibits on topics as varied as former Mayor Ed Koch's "rescue" of the city, architectural photography, and the effect of various ethnic communities on city life.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Founded in 1974 by Cornell Capa, brother of eminent war photographer Robert Capa, the **International Center of Photography Museum** ✯ (1133 Avenue of the Americas, at 43rd St.; ☎ 212/857-0000; www.icp.org; $10 adults, $7 seniors and students; Tues–Thurs and Sat–Sun 10am–6pm, Fri 10am–8pm; B, D, F, V to 42nd St.) has a definite grounding in photojournalism. So when you visit this handsome bi-level white box of a museum, you can expect to see probing, investigative photography that will illuminate some destination, social ill, or recent conflict. In the last few years it has also started creating exhibitions that explore the world of art photography, with video pieces, collage, and other works that test the bounds of photography in interesting ways. I only wish that the entrance fee was a bit lower, as you can easily see the three or so exhibits (the normal maximum at any one time) in 45 minutes or less. Still, those interested in photography or current events should enjoy this intelligent, small museum.

MORE MEDIA

The **Museum of Television and Radio** (25 W. 52nd St., just off Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/621-6800; www.mtr.org; $10 adults, $8 seniors and students over 14, $5 for children under 14; Tues–Sun noon–6pm, Thurs until 8pm; E, V to Fifth Ave.) raises the question of whether it's worth it to spend $10, and 2 hours of your vacation, watching TV. If you're an avid fan of pop culture or a student of history, the museum's 120,000 programs, including such historic broadcasts as the first moonwalk, the debut episode of Sesame Street, or the Nixon-Kennedy debate, may interest you. If not, this is a piss-poor way to spend your time and money in New York and not recommended in this era of the VCR and DVD. For a much better look at the artistry behind TV, visit Queens' Museum of the Moving Image (p. 160).

A SEAFARING MUSEUM & MALL

The South Street Seaport Museum and Seaport Area (12 Fulton St., between Front and South sts.; ☎ 212/748-8590; www.southstseaport.org.; $8 adults, $6 students and seniors, $4 children 5–12; Apr–Oct Tues–Fri 10am–6pm, Nov–Mar

Fri–Sun 10am–5pm; 2, 3, 4, 5, J, Z, M to Fulton St.), with its massive collection of, well, sailing stuff—20,000 pieces of scrimshaw, models, maritime paintings, and other ephemera—doesn't normally excite me; I'm too much of a landlubber. Better are the daily tours of the three humongous historic sailing vessels the museum has moored off Pier 16, and the 1895 schooner cruises that often take place at sunset. To be fair, the museum often goes "off message" with worthy exhibits on topics tangentially related to the Seaport (in 2005, it hosted a fine one on Walt Whitman). The Seaport Museum also sponsors daily walking tours of the area, concerts, and lecture series. The area surrounding the seaport I find equally as uninspiring, a sad case of a historic area transformed into a tawdry mall. Except for the TKTS booth, the historic sailing vessels, and occasionally interesting shows at the museum, there's no real reason to make the trek here.

SEX—YES, SEX

Though it tries hard to avoid a carnival atmosphere, with voluminous and often soporific wall text accompanying each hard-core film clip, sex toy, "intercourse machine," and erotic photo, **The Museum of Sex** (233 Fifth Ave., entrance on 27th St.; ☎ 866/MOSEXNYC or 212/689-6337; www.museumofsex.org; $15 admission, but go to website for a $5 discount coupon; Mon–Fri 11am–6:30pm, Sat 11am–8pm; R, Q to 28th St.) still has a major "wink, wink, giggle, giggle" quotient. Not that I'm complaining; at 2005's exhibition of objects from the permanent collection, I learned about fetishes and saw some, er, sexual "enhancers" that I never imagined existed. But if you're interested in the subject from an anthropological perspective, you may be disappointed. For the rest of us, including all of the folks who seemed to be out on dates (or perhaps they met there?), the museum is good, dirty fun. (Do I need to mention that the museum's exhibits are far too graphic to take children to?)

SKYSCRAPERS

The Skyscraper Museum (39 Battery Place; 212/945-6324; www.skyscraper.org; $5 adults, $2.50 seniors and students; Wed–Sun noon–6pm; 1 to Rector St.) is more interesting than you'd expect. An architecturally innovative space in and of itself (notice how the shiny metals, ascending ramp, and mirrored surfaces gives the smallish room its own skyscraper aspect), the museum explores not only the structural feats behind these soaring structures, but also the economic forces that shaped them and the sociological impact skyscrapers have, through a series of changing exhibits. It's a well-curated gallery that even nonarchitecture buffs should enjoy.

QUEENS MUSEUMS & SIGHTS

Queens has recently developed into a museum powerhouse, home to half a dozen fine institutions. Along with the Louis Armstrong House (p. 166) and the Museum of the Moving Image (p. 160), I highly recommend the following art museums.

It's a difficult museum to get to, but the **Isamu Noguchi Museum** ★ (32–37 Vernon Blvd., entrance on 33rd St.; ☎ 718/204-7088; www.noguchi.org; $10 adults, $5 seniors and students, free for kids under 12; Wed–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 11am–6pm; N, W to Broadway) is certainly worth the trek. Utterly

unique, it's the only museum in the nation to be founded by an artist in his lifetime, dedicated to his work, and curated by him. As Noguchi (1904–1988) was a genius in a number of fields—sculpture, architecture, ceramics, furniture design—he was more than up to the task, and created a space that is at once sublimely balanced and (often) rapturously beautiful. The first floor consists of three large galleries housing monolithic sculptures in stone, marble, and steel; a video room (where footage of the artist at work is on a constant loop); a small cafe/bookstore; and an updated Zen sculpture garden (one of the most serene spots in the city). The second floor is dedicated to changing exhibits from the collection of smaller pieces—chess sets, set design pieces, furniture, lamps, and more. Gallery talks, free with admission and held at 2pm each day, are helpful for those not familiar with Noguchi's work, as they illuminate the complex engineering issues and intentions behind his large, sometimes slablike, nonrepresentational works.

A word on transportation: As I said above, the museum is difficult to access. Those who visit on the weekends can take a free shuttle bus that leaves at regular intervals from the Asia Society (725 Park Ave., at 70th St.) in Manhattan, but if you plan on visiting during the week, a subway ride will either have to be paired with a substantial walk (about a half-mile) or a bus once you're in Queens. Allow an hour for transportation to and from the museum.

More than any other museum in New York, with the possible exception of the Whitney, **PS 1 Contemporary Art Center** ★★ (22–75 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City; ☎ 718/784-2084; www.ps1.org; suggested donation $5 adults, $2 seniors; Wed–Sun noon–6pm; 7 to 45th Rd./Courthouse Sq., or V to 23rd St./Ely Ave.) has been, since its founding in 1976, a proving ground for young artists. That means the work you're going to see here will be challenging, right of the moment, and sometimes downright wacky. "PS 1 is mythological," says Assistant Director Brett Littman. "Wherever I go, people know that there's this crazy building in Long Island City where you see crazy art. They come here to put a notch on their culture belt."

That "crazy building" was once a public school (hence the name), and its somewhat decrepit charm is part of the experience. Because it's not a fancy white box of a space (like its sister institution, the Museum of Modern Art), PS 1 allows its artists to create full-blown, sometimes invasive, installations in the space (in the summer of 2005, one artist blasted holes in the brick wall of a gallery). It also uses all kinds of unusual spaces to house art, such as the boiler room in the basement, where dusty old equipment stands side by side with sculptures and neon displays. One of my favorites of the few permanent pieces in the museum is a small hole in the floor of the lobby area with a video of a tiny artist shouting "help me!" in a number of different languages. (Look for the wall text about artist Pipoleti Rist's *Selfless in the bath of lava* to locate the hole.)

The bulk of the work you'll see here will be in changing exhibits, as the museum does not collect art. Instead, visitors are usually greeted with as many as 14 different shows in all parts of the building and, as I've said, some can be quite, well, bizarre. In its retrospective of New York City art in 2005, one framed sculpture turned out to be the actual hand of the artist who was sitting on the other side of the wall, personifying her art. Now if that's not worth $5, I don't know what is.

NEW YORK'S ARCHITECTURAL STANDOUTS

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine ★★ (1047 Amsterdam Ave., at 110th St.; ☎ 212/316-7490; www.stjohndivine.org; 1 to 110th St.) leads the list of Gotham's most significant structures. Little-known fact: The largest cathedral in the world is *not* St. Peter's in Rome (which is actually not officially a cathedral), it's St. John the Divine up in Harlem. Odder fact: Despite the popish name, it isn't Catholic, it's Episcopalian. Oddest fact: Though construction began on the cathedral in 1892, the building is yet to be completed, and many estimate that it will take another 100 years for that to happen.

All of which makes this a fascinating building to visit, as you'll see a bit of how the ancient cathedrals of Europe might have been built. The 121,000-square-foot structure, a blend of Romanesque and Gothic elements (thanks to the varying tastes of the architects who have worked on it over the past century), is being built without steel, in the classic Gothic manner. To that end, a master stonecutter was brought in from Europe to help train a cadre of American stonecutters in the necessary work in 1979. There's still much work to be done (including a lot of fundraising!). For over a hundred years a temporary dome has kept parishioners dry; that will eventually be replaced. And an unfortunate fire in one portion of the building has also added to the load of work. But what is in place—and there's a lot—is quite beautiful, especially the Rose Window in the apse, the largest in North America. A daily 11am tour (1pm on Sun) of the cathedral explains the construction work and jumbled history of the place.

You may also want to attend a service here, as these tend to be among the most musical, progressive services in the city. I particularly recommend the New Year's Eve service, which usually features original work from some of the best composers in town, and the Blessing of the Animals (on the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, usually Oct 4), a ceremony in which New Yorkers bring their pets—ranging from puppies to pythons to thoroughbred horses—to be blessed.

In the **Chrysler Building** ★★★ (405 Lexington Ave., at 43rd St.; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central Station), we see the last burst of what Alan Greenspan would call the "irrational exuberance" that sent stocks and buildings soaring to the heavens before the thudding crash of 1929. Throughout the previous decade, real estate speculators had been throwing up building after building in lower Manhattan and Midtown, adding almost 100 skyscrapers of 20 stories or more, and utterly transforming the skyline of the city. Automaker Walter P. Chrysler commissioned architect William Van Alen to top them all, instructing him that he wanted a building "higher than the Eiffel Tower," the tallest in the world at that time. What Chrysler would soon learn was that the gentlemen behind the Bank of America had the same ambition, and they had hired Van Alen's former partner (and sworn enemy) H. Craig Severance to build them the tallest building on the planet down on Wall Street. Soon the race was on, as each architect returned continually to the drafting board, adding 10 more stories of penthouses here, a lantern there, a 50-foot flagpole. In the fall of 1929, Severance was sure he had won, so he completed the Bank of America building at 927 feet. Van Alen then unveiled the coup de grace that he had been hiding in an elevator shaft—a

silver spike to crown his building, making it 1,046 feet, an unbeatable 117 feet higher than his rival's.

Not only taller, the Chrysler was the more striking of the two buildings, its scalloped spire set like a jaunty jester's cap atop a sleek tower. Take a look at the sharp stainless-steel eagles that jut out just below the roof; the "gargoyles" below those on the 61st floor are actually modeled after the hood ornament of the 1929 Chrysler Plymouth.

The Chrysler remains one of the most impressive Art Deco buildings ever constructed, but it wasn't the tallest for long. Less than a year after it was completed, the Empire State Building assumed that mantle and held it until the World Trade Center came along.

The Flatiron Building ★★★ (23rd St., between Broadway and Fifth Ave.; R, Q, 6 to 23rd St.) is smaller than the Chrysler but just as distinguished. You'll probably know the Flatiron Building even before you see it thanks to the famous photos of the building taken by Alfred Stieglitz, who snapped it numerous times, calling the Fuller Building (its original name) "a picture of new America still in the making." Many consider it the first skyscraper in New York; it certainly was one of the first to use a steel frame, the classic skyscraper structure. Its unusual triangular shape was architect Daniel Burnham's solution to a space problem: The building rests on the bow-tie intersection where Broadway and Fifth Avenue cross each other. In order to produce a decent amount of rentable space, he built it to a towering 375 feet on every sliver of land he had available to him. The apex is just 6 feet across at its narrowest point. When it was first erected in 1902, crowds used to gather in Madison Square Park across the street to wait for it to fall down! Later crowds were drawn here by the urban myth that the building's shape caused strange wind patterns that were effective in blowing up women's skirts. The cops who dispersed these groups of gaping men would call out "23 skidoo!" and so a slang term was born. One of the most beloved buildings in the city, it has been compared by many to a mighty ship sailing up Fifth Avenue.

In ancient Roman times, the entrances to great cities were framed with monumental arches, meant to awe all who passed through. When **Grand Central Terminal** ★★★ (42nd St. at Park Ave.; ☎ 212/340-2210; www.grandcentralterminal.com; 4, 5, 6, S, 7 to 42nd St./Grand Central Station) was being built at the turn of the last century, it was recognized that our railroad terminals were our grand gateways, the first view a traveler would have of the metropolis. So the architects of both Grand Central and the late great Pennsylvania Station (the original, torn down in the 1960s) conspired to create as much pomp and stateliness as possible, filling these spaces with the symbols and architecture of imperial Rome. On Grand Central's facade, 10 colossal Doric fluted pillars tower over Park Avenue; above them a colossal statue of Mercury, the god of travel, spreads his arms in welcome as Hercules and Minerva, gods of strength and wisdom, lounge at his feet. (The face of the clock below the sculpture is the largest piece of Tiffany glass in the world.)

The station's interior is no less impressive, its concourse soaring the equivalent of nine stories to a vaulted ceiling on which the signs of the zodiac are created from 59 fiber-optic lights and 2,500 painted stars (created by Paul Helleu—now, that was some paint job!). The side walls feature massive windows that throw shafts of light onto the acre-long marble floor. Not that the station needed them: One of

its innovations was the use of electric lights, so you'll see bare bulbs sprinkled throughout the station and on the massive chandeliers that overhang the concourse. Two hundred buildings were demolished to make way for the station, which opened on February 2, 1913, bearing a price tag of $80 million.

As you walk through, take in all of the trendy shops housed in the arteries of the main concourse; the dining concourse below, with the famed Oyster Bar at its heart (p. 79); the Campbell Apartments, former office of a finance tycoon and now a fab bar (p. 289); and Vanderbilt Hall (towards 42nd St., off the main concourse), which houses seasonal markets and special exhibitions. If you're traveling with children, take them to the "whispering gallery" right outside the Oyster Bar. Stand on one side of the arch there and have your child stand on the other, and then whisper to each other back and forth; a trick of acoustics allows sound to travel from one side of the vault to the other.

Free tours of the station are offered every Wednesday at 12:30pm (meet at the information booth in the center of the concourse) and Friday at 12:30pm in front of the Whitney at Altria, across 42nd Street from the station. For more information, go to the Grand Central Station website (see above).

The **New York Public Library** ★★ (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.; ☎ 212/930-0830; www.nypl.org; closed Mon; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central Station) is another masterwork; many art historians consider it to be the finest Beaux Arts building in the United States. It certainly is one of the grandest, completed in 1911 at a cost of over $9 million. The library was the result of a merger in 1895 of the three largest private libraries in the city—the Astor, Tilden, and Lenox libraries—and each carried an endowment significant enough to warrant the creation of this grand institution (it didn't hurt that Andrew Carnegie was persuaded to kick in $5.2 million in 1901). Built by the firm of Carrere and Hastings, the exterior takes its inspiration from the twin palaces on the north side of the Place de la Concorde in Paris and is done in the same French Renaissance style, a perfect harmony of columns, pediments, and statuary. Famous stone lions guard the entrance and are said to roar whenever a virgin passes by. Want to use the library? Well, you will be "reading between the lions" (sorry, I couldn't resist).

The library itself holds thousands of volumes, many of which are housed underground below what is now Bryant Park. A "no-browsing" facility, it still uses an ancient dumbwaiter system for retrieval of books in which the tomes are stacked into a small elevator and sent up when requests are made. Along with books, **Gottesman Exhibition Hall** (1st floor) often houses interesting exhibits on literary and New York history. Entrance is always free, and the palatial interior, with its endless expanses of marble and carved oak ceilings, is worth a look-see. For a more formal tour, time your visit to occur at 11am or 2pm, Tuesday through Friday, when guides lead visitors through the building.

Simplicity, clarity, and the most elemental forms. Those are touchstones of the "International Style" of architecture that came to the fore in the 1950s, and Mies van der Rohe's 1958 **Seagram Building** (375 Park Ave., at 53rd St.)—along with the slightly less impressive Lever House across the street—were its poster children. If the Seagram building looks familiar, that's because it inspired a craze for this style, with dozens of look-alikes thrown up in city after city around the world. But the Seagram is more detailed and handsome than most of those that followed it, featuring ornamental bronze beams (meant to reveal the structure of steel beams

underneath) and topaz-tinted windows. It was revolutionary not just for its simple shape but for its redirection of New York's zoning laws. Instead of using setbacks (the cascading layers found on early skyscrapers) to create enough open sky for those on the sidewalk, it was built straight up, with a large plaza for open space. City planners liked the design so much that they created a new zoning law in 1961 allowing owners to add floor space to their new buildings only if they, too, created plaza space at the base.

And though I discuss them elsewhere in this book, **Trinity Church** (p. 225); the **U.S. Customs House,** now the **National Museum of the American Indian** (p. 167); and the **Woolworth Building** (p. 227) are all noteworthy architectural sights.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

While children will enjoy most of the attractions listed in this chapter—especially those with our handy, dandy "kids" symbol attached—there are a handful of museums, zoos, and aquariums especially geared to the tastes of the Sponge Bob set.

Obviously, there's much to keep children busy in Central Park—from playgrounds every 5 blocks or so (always on the perimeter of the park, rarely in the interior) to the carousel at 64th Street off the park's baseball diamond to rowboats on the lake. But the **Central Park Zoo** ★ (behind Fifth Ave. at 64th St.; ☎ 212/439-6500; http://nyzoosandaquarium.com; $6 adults, $1.25 seniors, $1 children over 3; Apr–Oct daily 10am–5pm, Nov–Mar daily 10am–4:30pm; 6 to 68th St., or N, R to Fifth Ave.) tops them all, a delicious little jewel box of a zoo, with just enough animals to keep everyone entertained until their feet begin to tire. Founded in 1864 and completely overhauled in 1988 to make it a more animal-friendly environment (with glass and moats replacing cages), the zoo actually has two halves. The main section, at 64th Street, has a seal pond in the middle (look at the schedule for feeding show times) and three areas representing different climactic zones. Because you're going to be moving from zone to zone, it's important to dress in layers, as you'll be sweltering in the rainforest exhibit with its fluorescent frogs, melancholy Colobus monkeys, and parrots, and freezing in the arctic zone as you watch the penguins waddle and polar bears pace (the bears here are famous for being manic-depressive, so behaviorists were brought in to stop their compulsive behavior by creating hunting games). There's also an outdoor woodlands area, where you'll see badgers, beavers, and the like.

About 1 block's walk from the main zoo, still in the park, is the "Children's Zoo," featuring animal encounters where the kids get to interact with animals that don't bite, and a lot of fun places for children to climb, run, and blow off steam.

As the mother of two young daughters (aged 2 and 6 as I write this), I've probably spent more time in New York's children's museums than some of the staff. I'm very grateful to both the **Children's Museum of Manhattan** ★ kids (212 W. 83rd St., between Broadway and Amsterdam Ave.; ☎ 212/721-1223; www.cmom.org; $8 adults and children, $5 seniors; Wed–Sun 10am–5pm; 1 to 86th St.) and the **Brooklyn Children's Museum** ★ kids (145 Brooklyn Ave., at St. Marks St.; ☎ 718/735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; $4 children and adults; Wed–Fri 1–6pm, Sat–Sun 11am–6pm) for the shelter and excitement they've brought to rainy days over the years, and we patronize both on about an equal basis since I live fairly far downtown.

There are significant differences between the two. The Brooklyn Museum involves much more of a trek; families have to make either a half-mile walk from a subway station, or catch one of the infrequent trolleys that the museum provides on weekends. Despite this inconvenience, the Brooklyn Museum has a blessed serenity that the Manhattan one lacks, getting half as many visitors in a space that's roughly the same size. The oldest children's museum in the nation (in fact it started the movement), Brooklyn was designed from the ground up to delight kids and has such whimsical touches as a small enclosed stream that runs along the ramp that leads from floor to floor, allowing kids to splash and dip their fingers as they go. On the bottom floor is a small greenhouse with a tiny zoo of snakes and lizards attached (it's here where nature classes are given), a library with computers that children can sign up to use (get here early in the day if this interests you), and a space for changing exhibits, most created by the museum and usually quite engrossing. The second floor consists of a large urban play space where tots can pretend to make and sell pizza, skip rope, and do all the things city kids do; there is also an interactive exhibit on world instruments. On the third level is my daughter's favorite room: a small theater, filled with costumes, where kids gather to put on impromptu plays with one another, as we weary parents get a much-needed break as the audience. At the top of the museum is a room just for toddlers, with soft blocks, push toys, and the like. Various programs—performances and classes—are scheduled throughout the day on weekends. As I write this, Brooklyn Children's Museum is undergoing a renovation, so there may be new areas added to these classics.

The Manhattan Museum is a glitzier affair of changing exhibits that highlight the kiddie zeitgeist of the moment: Dora the Explorer, Maurice Sendak, and William Wegman's dog art were just a few of the recent exhibit themes. Those with toddlers should go directly to the Child Development Center on the fourth floor, where young 'uns can finger paint to their hearts' delight, play with little stoves, and send rubber balls rocketing down a twisted tube from a loft to the floor (there were days when I never got past this room). Older children will want to take part in the classes and special exhibits, and since these fill up fast, it's important that you stop by the small desk in front of the elevator on the first floor where you sign up for these options. ***One word of warning:*** Although the museum is easy to get to from anywhere in Manhattan, there will often be quite a wait just to get in, or to check your stroller. Try to arrive here early in the day on weekends, or plan your visit for a weekday afternoon when the place tends to be deserted.

What kid can resist a big red fire engine roaring by, or a room full of swooping red fire hats? You'll see both in abundance at the **New York City Fire Museum** kids (278 Spring St., between Varick and Hudson sts.; ☎ 212/691-1303; www.nycfiremuseum.org; suggested donation $5 adults, $2 seniors and students; Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm; C, E to Spring St.), which has one of the largest collections of firehouse memorabilia in the nation. It also has the good sense to hand out a free scavenger hunt map on arrival, which should keep even the most restless of youngsters amused.

Sony Wonder Lab kids (E. 56th St. and Madison Ave.; ☎ 212/833-8100; www.sonywonderlab.com; free admission; Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun noon–5pm; R, Q to Fifth Ave.) is one big ol' commercial for Sony products, and yes, it

dumbs down its explanations of the technology to a sad level at points. But if you happen to be in Midtown with someone, say, under five feet tall who loves to press buttons and play computer games, this four-level museum can be a welcome distraction. Filled with interactive experiences that allow users to play at environmental engineering, ultrasound technology, and sound editing, the experience is a lively one and certainly right for the price. Advance reservations are recommended as the museum does fill up; expect to spend about 1 hour tops in the museum. If you're truly interested in this subject, or would like your child to have a deeper educational experience with technology, head out to Queens to the superb Museum of the Moving Image (p. 160)

If you count number of animals as well as acreage, **The Bronx Zoo** ★★ kids (Fordham Rd. and Bronx River Pkwy.; ☎ 718/367-1010; www.bronxzoo.com; $9 adults, $6 children and seniors, pay what you wish on Wed; Mar 26–Oct 29, Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5:30pm; Oct 30–Mar 25 daily 10am–4:30pm; 2, 5 to E. Tremont Ave./West Farm Sq.) is still the largest zoo in the United States, an innovative, unbeatably entertaining place to spend the day. But with over 4,000 animals and 24 exhibits, you need to strategize your time wisely so you can see what you want without meltdowns from the younger set. When I visit with my girls, I most often make a direct path to the **Congo Forest** first ($3 extra; it gets mobbed), a remarkable exhibit of 24 silverback gorillas that begins with a short film. Once the film is over curtains dramatically part to reveal floor-to-ceiling windows, with cavorting gorillas galore (unlike other animals at the zoo, the gorillas are always awake if you visit in the daytime; along with the adults there always seem to be half-a-dozen baby gorillas in sight as well). From here we hop over to the nearby "bug carousel" or the butterfly exhibit (a tent with thousands of beautiful butterflies fluttering about your head), or to lunch at nearby Flamingo Park. Then we blow off steam for a bit at the children's zoo—with all the usual farm animals, plus a spider-web jungle gym, and a prairie dog park where children crawl into tunnels and pop their heads up right next to the critters. There are dozens of other animals, a fun monorail ride, feeding shows, and more to keep you entertained.

A word on transportation: Although you can take the subway (see above), I prefer to take the BXM11 Express Bus that runs up Madison Avenue, going express after 99th Street. It usually is faster than the subway, though be sure to check the bus schedule at **www.mta.nyc.ny.us**, as it runs only every half-hour or so (the schedule varies by day and time of year).

Finally, you can use a visit to the **New York Aquarium** ★ kids (Surf Ave. and W. 8th St.; ☎ 718/220-5100; http://nyaquarium.com; $12 adults, $8 seniors and children; hours vary seasonally, but in general it's open daily 10am–5pm; F, Q to W. 8th St., Coney Island) as a great excuse for taking in the gritty delights of **Coney Island.** Take the subway out here for a day that's partially educational, partially nostalgic, partially beachy (if you visit in summer), and a heck of a lot of fun.

The aquarium is (obviously) the educational component of the adventure and it fulfills that role magnificently, with over 8,000 animals from all parts of the globe spread across a 6-acre complex. There's a performing sea lion show, a mesmerizing exhibit on stingrays (some in a tank where you can touch them), exhibits on every variety of fish and mollusk, plus regular craft activities for children on weekends. Because this is an indoor/outdoor facility, it's important that you dress

appropriately for the weather, as part of your visit will be spent outdoors. It's also a good idea to get a schedule of feeding times when you arrive—a highlight of any visit here.

Once you're done with the aquarium, you can wander down the boardwalk to the honky-tonk paradise that is Coney Island. No polished, newfangled amusement park is this; what you find here instead are beachside parks with the types of rides you'd find at a traveling carnival. Mixed in are some of the classic Coney Island rides from times past, including the **Cyclone** (a huge wooden roller coaster, one of the scariest you'll ever ride because you'll do so with the knowledge that nearly a dozen people have been killed on it over the years), and the **Wonder Wheel** (a Ferris wheel with gliding compartments). Prices on rides vary but average between $2 and $5; most rides are open roughly between Easter and Labor Day (the weather is a factor). The best food in the 'hood is **Totonno's Pizza,** one of the first parlors in the city; it's located at 1524 Neptune Ave. between West 15th and 16th streets.

If you visit in summer, don't skip the Freak Show, which features the tattooed man, a snake charmer, a man who hammers nails up his nose, and other odd performers. It's one of the last shows of its kind in the U.S., and though it sounds unsavory, it's G-rated. You also have the beach itself here, a motley swatch of sand where gaggles of Brooklynites gather daily in summer to pitch their umbrellas, practice kung fu, listen to boomboxes, picnic, and swim. It's a very social scene, with many different ethnic groups represented, and fascinating in its own way.

TOURS OF THE BIG APPLE

If you'd prefer a guide at your side as you explore the city, you have a number of options, each of which involves a different mode of transportation and varying levels of coverage.

WALKING TOURS

For the most intellectually stimulating, complexly realized tours, you have to put on your sneakers and hike. Only at the slow pace of a walking tour is it possible to really do justice to the unique architecture, history, and culture of the city. There are a number of different tour companies, each with a unique approach to the subject at hand. Know that each offers tours of approximately 2 hours, usually rain or shine, and that each company will also set up private tours, if requested (though you'll pay more for those).

More personal than any other tours in the city, **Big Apple Greeters** ✯✯✯ (☎ 212/669-8159; www.bigapplegreeters.org; free) pairs untrained New York volunteers with visitors who have similar interests. Host and guest spend a few hours touring the host's neighborhood, and learning about life there from a native's point of view. To read about this unique experience in more depth, see chapter 6, "The Other New York."

Big Onion Tours ✯ (☎ 212/439-1090; www.bigonion.com; $15 adults, $10 students) are led by local graduate students, most of them studying history, with a few sociologists and literature majors thrown in. The emphasis therefore is on the history of the area you may be visiting—Greenwich Village, Times Square, Central Park—and the lectures tend to be complex, illuminating portraits of those places. My only problem with these tours is that the talk is often only tangentially related

to the building or park you may be viewing at the time, so the walking tour can feel more like a classroom lecture than an afternoon's exploration.

Joyce Gold History Tours ✯ (☎ 212/242-5762; www.nyctours.com; $12) also have an academic bent, as they're led by Ms. Gold, an instructor at both New York University and the New School for Social Research. Ms. Gold was formerly a real estate agent, and so you'll also hear a lot on this tour about the latest real estate deals, and the shocking prices of NY real estate. These are in-depth, entertaining tours, though here, too, I wish there were just a bit more emphasis on the architecture of the sites visited.

There are few more pleasant activities than meandering through Central Park, and the free **Central Park Conservancy** (www.centralparknyc.org; free) tours give you an excuse to do just that. Along the way, you'll learn how the park was designed and constructed, of the protests that have taken place here, and about the social activities the park has hosted over the years. Tours vary widely in quality, as they're led by volunteers (not licensed tour guides), but if you get a good one, they can be quite fun.

I'll Take Manhattan Tours ✯✯ (☎ 732/270-5559; www.nycwalks.com; $12) are my favorite of the bunch, led by curmudgeonly Anthony Griffa. A remarkable storyteller, Griffa is able to weave together architecture, cultural tidbits, and decades-old gossip (as well as history, of course) into an enjoyable afternoon's stroll. Unlike the other tour companies, he does not cover Harlem, and his tours tend to be more sporadically offered (check the website for a schedule).

The hippest, most exciting (and sometimes scary) walking tours around, **Soundwalks** ✯✯✯ (www.soundwalk.com; $12 to download, $19 in stores) are self-guided audio tours to neighborhoods across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. For a full description, go to p. 203 in chapter 6.

Street Smarts (☎ 212/969-8262; www.streetsmartsny.com; $10) offers the most sensationalistic view of the city, concentrating on ghost stories, famous gangsters, and ladies of the evening. It also hosts quite a fun pub tour each evening (drinks are extra).

BOAT TOURS

Despite the fact that this is a thoroughly commercial tour, in its 60-plus years of cruising round New York, **The Circle Line** ✯✯ (Pier 83 at W. 42nd St. and the Hudson River; ☎ 212/563-3200; www.circleline42.com; prices vary by tour, see below; tours depart two to four times daily, depending on season, beginning at 10am) has become as much a tourist attraction as the United Nations, and deservedly so. Led by witty, informed guides (many are also actors), the cruise takes travelers round the harbor on 3-hour, 2-hour, and 75-minute cruises. The longest makes a complete circle of the city ($28 adults, $23 seniors, $15 children), but I'd recommend the 2-hour tour instead ($23 adults, $19 seniors, $12 children). You'll miss Yankee Stadium and the view of the Palisades (the wooded cliffs of New Jersey) on that one, but all of the other highlights—the Statue of Liberty, the lower Manhattan skyline, the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building—are included. Make sure to arrive at the dock early because you'll want to grab a good seat: on the right-hand side of the boat, facing inward as you enter (that's the side that faces Manhattan; ask the staff if you're unclear). It can get very chilly on the water, so be sure to dress in layers, or take a seat inside.

From the most famous boat tour to . . . the cheapest. Most visitors—and even some New Yorkers—don't know that the **Staten Island Ferry** ✪ (Whitehall ferry terminal, southern tip of Manhattan; ☎ 718/815-BOAT; www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html.dot; daily, 24 hr.; Ⓝ, Ⓡ to Whitehall St., ❹, ❺ to Bowling Green, ❶ to South Ferry) makes its own daily excursion within Polaroid distance of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and Roosevelt Island. And riders pay absolutely nothing for the great views. You simply board the ship (be sure to wait for one of the older orange-and-green boats, because the newer ones don't have decks for viewing) and, as with the Circle Line, sit on the right-hand side (stay at the back of the ferry for the best view of the Manhattan skyline). It's a joke in New York that this is the best "cheap date' in the city, so don't be shy about toting along a bottle of wine, some bread, and cheese. But be sure to dress warmly: In winter the outdoor decks can be frigid. One-way, the trip takes approximately a half-hour, after which you'll need to disembark and take the next ferry back.

HOP-ON, HOP-OFF BUS TOURS

If you were to climb aboard any public bus (cost $2), turn to the person next to you, and ask, "What building is that?" you'd probably get a response as informative, accurate, and interesting as what you'll find on the much pricier, hop-on, hop-off bus tours of New York City. Upon spending a full day riding one after another, I was drenched in misinformation. One guide informed our bus that "most of the American Revolutionary battles took place in New York" (wrong!); another suggested we go to the ESPN Zone because the ancient Romans would have loved it since they "invented sports" (not!); yet another tour guide described Greenwich Village as an inexpensive haunt of bohemians and artists (not anymore!). I also hopped on and off three different buses that passed the Empire State Building and each gave a different answer for the total number of months that it took to complete the building (only one said 14, the correct number).

And when the information was correct, it was usually along the lines of "That's the building where the ball drops on New Year's Eve," a cursory statement made as we whizzed by, the guide not having time enough to give further details before moving on to the next sight. I also found that a lot of the commentary could be construed as commercials for some of the bigger tourist traps—Jekyll and Hyde, ESPN Zone, and so forth—leading me to wonder (I really don't know) whether there was some sort of sponsorship deal between the bus companies and these restaurants.

This is all a long way of saying: Don't take these tours. Yes, it's fun to sit high up as the city whizzes by, but the experience is so utterly superficial and so misleading (at points) that it is unworthy of the time or the considerable expense.

If you're still determined to try one of these companies, the major operators are:

- **Gray Line** (777 Eighth Ave., between 47th and 48th sts.; ☎ 800/669-0051 or 212/445-0848; www.newyorksightseeing.com; $37 per hop-on, hop-off loop, all day; $49 for all loops—uptown, downtown, Brooklyn, and the night tour—in 1 day; Ⓡ, Ⓠ, Ⓒ, Ⓔ to 50th St.). The most popular of the companies and the only with its own indoor visitor center, Gray Line offers a number of different tours to all parts of the city. Its buses have the advantage of offering two floors of seating, open-air on top and inside below for colder days. As with the other companies, it's possible to buy tickets at any of the stops the bus makes.

- **CitySights** (☎ 212/812-9000; www.newyorkcitysights.com; $37–$42 per hop-on, hop-off tour). CitySights offers fewer itineraries, although it does offer one unusual combo bus tour/walking tour (you borrow headphones and walk independently). Its salespeople, who work only on the streets in front of the bus stops (identify them by their bright yellow jackets), seem more willing to bargain on the price, possibly because these tours get far fewer takers than Gray Line (perhaps because its buses have no inside seating, a problem when the weather's not behaving).
- **Big Taxi Tours** (☎ 718/706-8687; $25). The smallest of the companies and the cheapest, it offers just one loop—from the Empire State Building to the Financial District and then up the West Side to Central Park and back to the start. Because it has only one bus departing per hour, this is really best for people who wish to simply stay on the bus and see the sights (hop-on, hop-off service, though available, really takes too long for this to be a feasible option).

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6 The "Other" New York

Your chance to experience the city as the locals do

In Buenos Aires they tango. In Paris, the preferred diversion is still conversation, in cafes, with cigarettes dangling. In Japan, the scorching bath is the pastime of choice, and Japanese flock in huge numbers to soak, relax, and socialize in bathhouses around the country.

From your point of view, as a traveler, these are wonderful touchstones, because you, too, when you visit these places, can make a few fumbling attempts at the tango, hang out in a cafe airing your broken French (cigarettes optional!), or slide ever so carefully into a Japanese bath seemingly heated to the temperature of lava.

But what do you do when you go to New York? What is the one activity that you, the visitor, can try that will instantly give you insight into the life of the city, the mindset of its locals, the frisson that binds residents to New York . . . even after high real estate prices have driven them out?

I wish I knew.

The truth is this is a city without a center, with hundreds of small communities, dozens of ethnic groups, and thousands of ways of passing the time. That makes it extremely difficult for tourists to get even a small insight into life here, let alone to meet and get to know locals. In fact, I know of no other city where the tourist experience is so vastly different from that of the locals'. Even the areas we hang out in are different (get a slingshot, load it up in Times Square, and you'll hit a visitor; do the same in the East Village and you'll soon have a very angry mob of downtowners chasing you back to your hotel).

This chapter will introduce you to some parts of the city that tourists rarely see and activities in which only locals engage. How we work, how we play, how we worship—these topics and more are covered. I would encourage you to try at least one or two of the suggested activities, along with the standard tourist activities, as they should give you a more profound experience of the city and its unique riches . . . for those willing to dig a bit beneath its surface.

HOW WE LEARN

Many people move to New York in the hopes of changing their lives in some way. Often this involves taking classes, and consequently there are dozens of learning opportunities available for adults every day of the week. I've tried to highlight some of the most accessible and interesting, starting with single-evening lectures.

EVENING LECTURES

As the home base of the American news media, New York is matched only by London in the number of free or inexpensive lectures, readings, and one-night classes held each evening, year-round. The folks in charge of creating buzz for a new book, product, or even a policy decision know that by getting it in front of the opinion makers here, they have a better chance of getting their message out to the rest of the world. You become their witting audience, not just by attending a lecture but by becoming part of the opinion-making machine (for all the good and the bad that implies).

What types of events will you see? Well, during the first week of October last year:

- Kurt Vonnegut and Art Buchwald presented an evening of political satire
- Best-selling author Judy Blume (of *Are you there God . . .*) spoke on writing and censorship
- Martha Stewart signed copies of her new cookbook
- A colloquium on the impact of the U.N., with one of that body's undersecretaries on the panel, was held at the New School
- Author Simon Winchester *(The Professor and the Madman)* discussed urban disaster scenarios
- Joan Didion shared her thoughts on the process of grieving
- A free panel was held on international careers with NGO's (non-governmental aid organizations), led by some of the top names in the field
- A "Dharma Salon," featuring instruction in meditation, was held for those new to Buddhism

These are just a small fraction of the hundreds of events that saturated the city that week, drawing crowds of locals and, I would guess, not one tourist. Why no visitors? Because nothing in the tourist literature that is customarily handed out at hotels ever mentions these less-commercial, quirkier offerings. It's necessary to seek them out, and you can do so easily by going to the following sources:

- ***Time Out* Magazine** ($2.99 on newsstands): The city's most comprehensive listings of lectures, signings, and other events of the mind; go to the "Around Town" and "Books" sections for details on the week's events.
- ***The New Yorker*** ($2.95 on newsstands): Has a listings section similar to the one in *Time Out* up front, but one that is infinitely more selective, promoting only the most intellectually stimulating programs.
- **92nd Street Y** (1395 Lexington Ave. at 92nd St.; ☎ 212/445-5100; www.92y.org): The top venue in the city for lectures and "conversations" of all types, the 92nd Street Y (originally called the Young Men's Hebrew Association) has been a fixture of the Jewish community since 1845. And though a number of programs are devoted to Jewish topics, the vast range of talks (open to all) in its twice- and sometimes thrice-weekly series (lectures tend to fall on Mon, Tues, and occasionally Thurs) are more far-reaching, covering issues of health, politics, gastronomy, ecology, and the arts. Some of the distinguished guests who have spoken here include Senator Barbara Boxer, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, newswoman Barbara Walters, actors Alan Alda and Ralph Fiennes, domestic diva Martha Stewart, and musician Billy

Joel. You'll find a complete list of upcoming events on the website (tickets average $25 and are also available online).

- **Columbia University** (www.columbia.edu/cu/news/calendar) and **NYU** (http://events.nyu.edu): Gotham's two mega-universities present excellent evening lectures on all sorts of topics. Visit the schools' websites for an advance preview of offerings, all of which are open to the general public as well as students.

ACTING CLASSES

One of the brightest, shiniest dreams about the Big Apple is to come here and make it big as an actor. To see a small slice of that world, audit an acting class at **Herbert Berghof Studio** (120 Bank St.; ☎ 212/675-2370; www.hbstudio.org; $10 to audit). The school, established in 1945 by Broadway diva Stella Adler and her husband, remains one of the most highly regarded in the city to this day. It's also the only one I know of that allows outsiders to sit in on classes. Watching these young and often seriously talented students work is an abject lesson in how difficult something as seemingly simple as appearing natural in front of a large crowd of people can actually be. And watching the teachers, many of whose faces you'll recognize from film and TV over the years—Earle Hyman, Jill Clayburgh, Anne Jackson, and Donna McKechnie are all on the faculty—is another lesson showing how near-impossible it is to make a living just as an actor. Each day there are approximately 30 classes to choose from, given at all hours and in disciplines as widely varied as Musical Performance, Scene Study, and Acting on Camera.

COOKING CLASSES

Though ideally you should be interested in cooking to take a class here, the **Institute of Culinary Education** (50 W. 23rd St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/847-0700; www.iceculinary.com) has another trait that makes it a star of this chapter: It has to be one of the easiest places to meet and actually get to know New Yorkers in the city. That's because since its inception, originally as the Peter Kump School in 1976, the emphasis here has been on "hands-on" classes. You won't be sitting in some dim lecture hall among a group of strangers. Instead, your class will be divided into small groups of two, three, or four, and for 3 to 4 hours, you'll cook or bake with your partners, poring over recipes, consulting with the teacher, and chatting away. Recreational classes, while serious (the school is known for engaging some of the most expert chefs in the city), are tremendously social. At the start of the class, crudités are put out, as at a cocktail party, so that you can snack while listening to the instructor's opening lecture. And, as at any good cocktail party, the crowd is well-mixed: There are young people in their 20s; professional types in their 30s, 40s, and 50s; and a smattering of retirees. At night the ratio of men to women is pretty close to 50 to 50 (though in the daytime women predominate).

If you're serious about cooking, you won't find a better school in the city. The instruction here is highly practical, and it aims to teach you as much about the principles of cooking as specific recipes. The classes in which I recently sat taught me the technique of putting my thumb and forefinger on the blade of a knife to stabilize it (it works like a dream); when it's important to buy expensive ingredients and when it won't matter; how to choose fresh herbs; and about the yin and

yang of Chinese cooking. From the esoteric to the basic, it's all on offer here; in fact, I.C.E. offers over a thousand recreational classes a year, more than any other cooking school in the world. They're taught in nine, state-of-the-art, gleaming, stainless-steel kitchens (you'll feel like you're the star of some Food Network show). Class prices range from $85 to $100 for a good 4 hours of instruction, plus a feast at the end, including wine, when you consume what you've made. The tuition may seem steep, but as staffer Annie McBride pointed out to me, "You'll be paying what you'd pay for a gourmet meal in a New York restaurant, but you'll leave with the knowledge of how to cook it yourself."

DANCE CLASSES

Hundreds of lithe young things come to New York each year expressly to dance. It's a major preoccupation among certain Big Apple tribes, some of whom do it for fun, and others who dream of becoming the 21st-century's Gwen Verdon, Mikhael Baryshnikov, or Martha Graham. And because this is such a fluid, changing world, very few centers require that students sign up for more than one class at a time. Taken on an ad hoc basis, they offer secret windows into this sheltered (and sheltering) world. In fact, it can be fascinating to simply stand outside and peer through the glass doors at dancers in training, so take this section as not only an invitation to pull on some tights, but as an opportunity to simply stand and watch in amazement at the things some human bodies can do.

I'll start with a non-hard-core option for beginning dancers, or for those who prefer ballroom to ballet. Every Tuesday and Wednesday at noon, **The Argentine Consulate** (12 W. 56th St. off Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/603-0400; Ⓔ, Ⓥ to Fifth Ave.) recruits. It's not looking for new citizens, but in an oddly appropriate show of patriotism it seems determined to add new tango dancers to the world with free dance lessons. About 40 novices show up at each class in a difficult-for-tango ratio of three women to every man, but because the first hour is spent mastering steps alone, it doesn't much matter. The tutorial is sometimes led by a former ballet dancer: a woman in her 60s with a throaty accent, upright bearing, and the ability to break down steps in such a way that even a clod like myself could follow them. As the wailing of the violins swelled, I slowly went through my paces, concentrating on not looking at my feet, on keeping my movements as pantherlike and steady as possible, and on moving with "pride." It's ultimately a very Zen experience, akin to tai chi, and surprisingly relaxing. During the second hour, the real tango fanatics show up, New Yorkers who've been hooked on the dance ever since *Tango Argentina* debuted on Broadway a decade ago, and for a rippling hour, men and women stalk one another, feet darting this way and that, hip to hip, adding a bit of heat to the sunny glare of midday. ***One note:*** A consular employee will ask for your name, phone number, and e-mail address when you enter, but this is simply so they can alert you if the next week's class is cancelled. You can decline if you don't want to share this information.

For a more challenging—some might say downright scary—experience, attempt a dance class at the **Broadway Dance Center** (221 W. 57th St. between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/582-9304; www.broadwaydancecenter.com; $14 per class), which is where New York's legions of chorines go for their daily ablutions of stretches, steps . . . and a check of the competition. One of the largest dance schools in the world, with over 350 classes on offer at any one time, it covers everything

from ballet to tap to theater dance to hip-hop. Most are taught by big-name dancers and choreographers (from the world of music videos and theater). Pack your leotard; appropriate attire is required, as well a good dose of attitude—the beginner classes here are as rigorous as intermediate classes anywhere else. **Steps** (2121 Broadway, between 75th and 76th sts.; ☎ 212/874-2410; www.stepsnyc.com; $15 per class) on the Upper West Side is a smaller studio but just as serious, and the bonus here is that you can wander in and watch a class from the doorway without having to participate yourself (there's a less strict door policy here).

HOW WE WORK

As in the rest of the country, most of the work done in New York City takes place in offices honeycombed with cubicles or behind the counters of restaurants, shops, and salons. You won't really be able to see these New Yorkers at work, nor would you really want to. But New York is also one of the two media capitals of the country (the other being Los Angeles), so some of our jobs have a bit of glitz to them, meaning that they need an audience in order to exist. Below, I'll tell you how to become part of the many audiences needed around town, as well as how to get a peek at some other working folks and their fascinating jobs.

ATTENDING A TV TAPING

There's no job as glitzy—or accessible to the visitor—as TV production. Literally dozens of shows are taped in the Big Apple each day, many of which require an audience. Though it may seem odd to take time out of your vacation to do what you do at home—watch TV—it's the behind-the-scenes elements that make the experience here: the scurrying grips and cameramen, the "warm-up act" before the show, and seeing what the host does when the camera isn't on.

Attending tapings is a very popular activity, so it's important that you request tickets in advance, *far* in advance. In fact, 6 months ahead of time is not too early for a cult hit such as *Saturday Night Live* or *Late Night with David Letterman.* If you can't plan that far ahead, or are rejected for an advance seat, all hope is not lost—stand-by seats are distributed for most shows. In order to snag one of these, you'll need to get up early and do a lot of waiting around, but many people on the stand-by list do get in. ***One warning:*** Stand-by tickets are given out by person, not by couple, so if you're traveling with someone else, both of you have to brave the line to attend the show.

Some of the available tapings include:

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart

The best show on TV, to my mind, this hilarious news parody is a very hot ticket. In fact, *The Daily Show* has temporarily suspended its advance ticketing because of overwhelming demand. Stand-by tickets, however, are still doable (see below).

Tapes: Monday through Thursday at 5:45pm; audience arrives between 4pm and 5pm; doors open at 5pm.

Online information: If the show ever starts giving out tickets in advance again (and I would guess that it will), go to www.comedycentral.com/shows/the_daily_show/tickets/tickets.jhtml for more information.

Last-minute tickets: Call ☎ 212/586-2477 on Friday between 11 and 11:30am a week prior to the date you wish to attend.
Stand-by tickets: Occasionally, people who line up outside the studio (733 11th Ave., between 51st and 52nd sts.) at 5pm are admitted, but this method is very iffy.
Fine print: No one under 18 admitted.

The DaySide

A right-wing talk show on tabloid news topics, presented by the FOX network.

Tapes: Every weekday between 1 and 2pm; audience arrives at 11:30am.
Books audience: One or two days in advance; this isn't that popular a show.
Call: ☎ 877/FOX-TKTS.
Apply online at: www.foxnews.com/dayside/ticket_request.html
Stand-by policy: None, so far as I can tell.
Fine print: FOX does allow those under 18 to attend if their parents sign a consent form.

Daily Download

You may not have heard of the Fuse network, but your teen probably has, and if she likes music, she would probably kill to attend one of these celeb-heavy tapings, which pair interviews with bands such as My Chemical Romance and Korn with music videos and audience interaction.

Tapes: Weekdays from 6 to 7pm; audience arrives between 4:30 and 5pm.
Books audience: It depends on the talent. Sometimes a show will fill up a month in advance, but often it's possible to get tickets the week of the taping.
Call: ☎ 212/324-3461.
Apply online at: www.fusetv.com.
Stand-by policy: Usually stand-bys get in. Call the ticket line for the studio address.
Fine print: Ages 14 to 26 only (sorry, Grandma!). Those between 14 and 18 must bring a signed letter of consent from their parents.

Late Night with Conan O'Brien

If Marcel Duchamp had been a comedian with a talk show, it might have turned out something like this one, which features an hour of absurdist humor alternating with celebrity interviews (two per show is the norm).

Tapes: Tuesday through Friday 5:30 to 6:30pm; audience arrives at 4pm.
Books audience: Approximately 2 months in advance.
Call: ☎ 212/664-3036 (and keep pushing the numbers for more info until you get a live person).
Online information: www.nbc.com/nbc/footer/Tickets.shtml#latenight
Stand-by policy: Would-be audience members show up at 9am to pick up stand-by tickets and then return at 4:30pm. Usually a handful of stand-bys will get into each show.

Fine print: No one under 16 admitted. Audience members can book up to four tickets at a time. Those who show up earliest get the best seats (those in front may be scanned by cameras).

Me sounding off: Conan has to have the worst ticket distribution system of any television show. Here's how it (doesn't) work: Four-night blocks are opened up approximately 2 months in advance, but only 2 small blocks at a time (when I called in early Nov, for example, I was told I could book for the last 2 weeks of Jan only). So those who wish to get different dates have to keep calling back over and over until they hit it right (and sometimes a 2-week period that goes unsold will be held into the next week, making it even more difficult to gauge when to phone). Friday is the most popular date and tends to sell out first; the largest number of tickets tend to be available at the beginning of the week.

The Late Show with David Letterman

Wry, sardonic, and usually funny, the Letterman talk and variety show is the second hottest ticket in New York (after *The Daily Show*). A far larger auditorium, however, means that many more people get to see Dave live each week than Jon Stewart. The audience often becomes part of the show, so come prepared to entertain.

Tapes: Monday through Wednesday at 5:30pm and Thursday at 4:30 and 6:30pm; audience arrives 90 minutes before the show.

Books audience: As far as 6 months out, though you can snag a ticket on the day of the show.

Apply online: At www.cbs.com/latenight/lateshow/show_info/ls_show_info_inperson_ticket.shtml. No, that's why we have underscores here. You will receive a follow-up call from a staffer who will ask you trivia questions about the show, so bone up if you want to get in.

Apply in person: At the Ed Sullivan Theater (1697 Broadway, between 53rd and 54th sts.; Mon–Fri 9:30am–12:30pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm). Using this method, you can apply for that day's show, or any other show in the upcoming month. You will be told by phone whether or not you've gotten the tickets. Be aware that this is really an audition: You'll be asked how often you watch the show, what your favorite moments have been, and trivia questions about the show. Those who perform best, get in.

Stand-by: Numbers are assigned starting at 9am, day of show, and if there's room in the audience, stand-bys get in on a first come, first-served basis.

Fine print: No one under 18 admitted. Thursday is audience participation night, so come prepared if you want to get on camera. And this theater makes the rest seem warm, so bring a jacket.

Live with Regis and Kelly

Bubbly blond and gruff old guy chat with famous people, on one of the most popular of the daytime offerings.

Tapes: Monday through Friday at 10am; audience arrives 90 minutes prior to show time.

TV Taping Tips

1. **Doll up.** If you're hoping to get your face on camera, dress nicely. Seats are not given out at random; instead, on shows where audience participation is key, they place the well-coiffed folks wearing attractive, vibrant colors at the front.
2. **Layer up.** To keep the camera equipment in top shape, TV studios are kept the temperature of the Arctic Circle. You're going to want to bring something warm to wear, even in August
3. **Own up.** When you apply for a seat, be sure to give them all the information they want, including your full name, daytime phone number, address, e-mail address, and requested dates (be flexible on dates if you can). Leave out any of this information and you won't be attending the show.

Books audience: This show can sell out a year in advance. Send in your request as soon as possible and no later than 4 weeks before your requested date.
Apply by mail: Write to "Live with Regis and Kelly" Tickets, Ansonia Station, P.O. Box 230-777, New York, NY 10023-0777.
Online information: http://tvplex.go.com/buenavista/regisandkelly/showinfo/tickets.html
Stand-by policy: Numbered stubs given out starting at 7am, holders get in on a first-come, first-serve basis if seats are available. Those who don't make it in are sometimes offered tickets to *The Tony Danza Show,* a struggling and much less popular talk show.
Fine print: Kids ages 10 to 18 are admitted, but must be accompanied by an adult.

Saturday Night Live

It's been great, it's been less-than-great, and then near-great again. I personally think this comedy sketch show is in a valley right now, but occasionally it's still funny, and seeing the live taping with the mad dash of set changes, costume changes, and general hysteria (not to mention the top-flight musical guests) is a kick.

Tapes: About every other Saturday, September through May, at 11:30pm (there are also tickets to an 8pm dress rehearsal that night); audience arrives at 10pm.

Books audience: In the month of August for the upcoming season. Your e-mail is your contact information at that point and is entered into a ticket lottery. If you are chosen, you hear from SNL; if not, you don't.
Apply by e-mail: Send your request to SNLtickets@nbc.com.
Stand-by policy: Arrive no later than 7am at the 50th Street side of 30 Rockefeller Center (under the NBC marquee) to get stand-by tickets. Come back at 10pm, and if there are seats you may get in.

The View

A talk show with four chatty hostesses, and usually one celebrity guest. Very little audience participation, though the camera does often scan the audience for reaction shots, so look your best.

Tapes: Every weekday, 11am to noon; audience arrives at 9:30am.
Books audience: 12 weeks in advance.
Apply by mail: Send a postcard to The View, 320 W. 66th St., New York, NY 10023.
Apply online: http://abc.go.com/daytime/theview/tickets.html
Stand-by policy: Numbered stand-by stubs are distributed between 8:30am and 10am. Holders then return by 10:20am and wait in the hopes of getting in. The earlier you pick up your numbered stub, the more likely you are to get in.
Fine print: Must be age 16 or older to attend. Tickets are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis; if you arrive late you may not get in as they do sometimes overbook.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA

Have you ever toyed with a car engine or taken apart a clock? The **backstage tour of the Metropolitan Opera** (at Lincoln Center, off Columbus Ave. between 61st and 65th sts.; ☎ 212-769-7020; www.metroperafamily.org; Oct–June, Mon–Fri 3:30 pm, Sun 10:30am; $12) offers the same kind of fascination. You don't even have to care a whit about opera to enjoy it. This is simply the best showbiz behind-the-scenes tour in New York, as it takes you through all the meticulous steps it takes to put on a show—or 22 shows (the seasonal average at the Met). The 1¾-hour tour will whisk you through half of the 10 stories that make up the backstage area of the auditorium. You'll see carpenters re-creating Roman forums in plywood, following plans that have them methodically sawing out pieces down to the sixteenth of an inch; wigmakers creating hairpieces from scratch, shaping a cap and then pulling the hair (imported from Sweden) through it one strand at a time; seamstresses sewing reams of beads; prop masters sculpting severed heads (for Salome); and—most fun—you'll get to peek into rehearsal rooms and listen to trumpet-voiced singers practicing their arias and gestures. In fact, watching the hundreds of people toiling backstage to bring these operas to life is a show in and of itself. ***One warning:*** The tour involves non-stop walking, often in slippery, sawdusty areas, so wear sneakers or shoes with good treads.

FACTORY TOURS

New York's industrial heyday is long gone, but a handful of factories do remain in the Big Apple. Three periodically open their gates to the public, and when they do, they have a Wonka-like appeal—the ultra-cool factory tour!—introducing you to the intricacy, effort and, yes, art that goes into creating their products.

People come from all over the world to tour the premises of **Steinway & Sons** (19th Ave. and 38th St., Astoria, Queens; ☎ 718/721-2600; www.steinway.com; free admission; Ⓝ to Ditmars St.), the famed piano manufacturer. These very special tours take place only on Monday and Tuesday mornings in the spring and early fall (call for details). In the course of the 2½-hour tour, you'll witness the

yearlong painstaking process of handcrafting a piano, watching workers delicately sawing, rubbing, voicing, and stringing the instruments. If you're lucky, you'll be there as I was, when the workers bend the huge planks of wood around an iron press that creates the distinctive grand piano shape, a method invented by C. F. Theodore Steinway. (Sounds dull, but it's actually a strangely balletic process to witness.) One of the final stops is the "Pounder Room," where a machine methodically bangs all of the keys of a piano up to 10,000 times, looking for any possible flaws.

Fewer than 5,000 Steinway pianos are created per year (other manufacturers produce 100,000 per year), yet over 98% of the world's top classical pianists use these instruments exclusively. After witnessing the loving care these pianos get, you'll understand why.

Less a tour than a 40-minute lecture, the **Brooklyn Brewery Tour** (79 N. 11th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn; ☎ 718/486-7422; www.brooklynbrewery.com; free admission; Sat 1–4pm; L to Bedford St.) offers a witty introduction to the world of hops and yeast, and a nice overview of the underdog history of this particular company, now the 24th largest brewery in the United States. You'll hear about how a former journalist went from bar to bar, selling his beer from the back of a van; why this brew, famous in New York City, is better known in Denmark than it is in Colorado; and how beer should be made (and isn't at Budweiser, Coors, or Miller). Best of all, at the end of the free tour, you'll get a ticket for a free pint. Behind me, while standing in line at the bar, one slacker 20-something remarked to another: "We'll drink these, then take the tour again!"

Making money, quite literally, is the job of the economic factory that is the **Federal Reserve Bank** (33 Liberty St. at the corner of Nassau St.; ☎ 212/720-5000; www.ny.frb.org; free admission; Mon–Fri 10:30am, 11:30am, 1:30pm, and 2:30pm; reservations required 5 days in advance; 2, 3, 4, 5, A, C, J, M, Z to Fulton St.). Although you won't see the currency being printed—that function was moved from this site to New Jersey in 1992—you will likely see more lucre than you ever will again in your lifetime when you descend 80 feet down to the basement of this financial fortress, where a gold vault right out of *Mission Impossible* is housed. Down here, behind a door that's a good 5 feet thick, the Fed keeps $100,000 billion worth of gold bars, a full 25% of all the gold reserves in the world, and far more than is housed in Fort Knox. Ninety-five percent of the gold stored here belongs to foreign nations, who use this facility, embedded in the bedrock of Manhattan and guarded by a small army of marksmen (they have their own on-site firing range for practice), because it's considered the safest place in the world for this type of storage. I wish I could give you more details, but the security here is so spandex-tight that my reporter's notebook was confiscated at the door.

The gold is supplemented by precious coins (one worth $7 million), in an exhibit in the lobby by the Numismatic Society in partnership with the Fed. Also featured on the tour are brief videotapes detailing the work of the Fed, and an interactive exhibit explaining what the massive, semi-governmental agency does (it's an interesting topic). The entire tour takes a bit less than an hour.

LAW & ORDER: THE REAL THING

After years of watching cop movies and TV shows set in Gotham, you may feel like you've already been inside a **New York City courtroom.** The reality, however,

is vastly different: weirder, with scruffier characters, lawyers so young they look like high schoolers, and an offhand, almost casual atmosphere that somehow underscores even more grippingly the life and death issues faced by the defendants. And with the sheer volume of cases coming in and out of the courts, you're almost guaranteed to find an engrossing trial to watch.

Your best bet is to go to **100 Center St.,** at the corner of Leonard St. (4, 5, 6 to Brooklyn Bridge/City Hall), Manhattan's busiest criminal courthouse. Jury trials, several per day, are held from 10am to 5pm Monday through Friday, and night court is on from 5pm to 1am (meal breaks at noon–1pm and 10–11pm). If you visit during the daytime, go directly to the 10th floor, Room 1000, where the clerk will be able to direct you to the day's felony trials. You can simply walk in and sit down in any courtroom; no one will question you or think it odd. Arrive at night, and simply go to one of the two first-floor courtrooms where anyone arrested after the sun goes down is arraigned, from people caught driving under the influence all the way up to accused rapists and murderers.

Watching the trials and arraignments is a lesson in how our system works . . . admittedly a chilling one at times. Though I've seen many good lawyers and competent judges, I've also witnessed sessions of name-calling between the two that would embarrass a kindergartner; and night court prosecutors so obviously unable to distinguish one case, or prisoner, from another that the whole process raises goose bumps of sympathy for the defendants, no matter how guilty he or she may actually be. A fascinating, sometimes disturbing look at the underpinnings of the city.

HOW WE PLAY

You'll find an extensive list of nightlife options in chapter 10, with a bar and lounge section that uncovers many of the local hangouts, places where tourists rarely venture. This section covers the more unusual types of nightlife (and four playful daytime experiences), such as Russian nightclubs and parties that pop up in different places each month.

QUIZ NIGHTS

Meeting people in a bar can be an intimidating prospect even for natives, so a number of bars have started adding game nights into the mix, the competitions providing the social Vaseline that many need in order to get to know the person on the next bar stool. All the rage, these events include adult spelling bees, bingo fests, and Scrabble tournaments, but the most popular among smarty pants New Yorkers are the "Quiz Nights."

Can you answer such questions as:

- The easternmost point in the central time zone is the westernmost point of what state?
- In the early 1800s, which explorers gave names to more than 1,500 places on the American continent?
- What's the sleepiest of all mammals?
- What actor played *Serpico* in the movie of the same name?

If so, you may well enjoy these evenings, too. Contestants generally arrive in teams of two or more and compete for a range of prizes. Quiz Nights are now held every weekday evening.

Monday

Slipper Room (167 Orchard St., at Stanton St.; ☎ 212/253-7246; www.slipperroom.com; doors open at 7:30pm; F to First Ave.) is perhaps the most cutthroat of the bunch. It's the only one to charge admission ($7), and the questions asked by geek-stud host Noah Tarnow are the most difficult (the first two in the list above are from the Slipper Room's "Quiz Off"). Answer all of them right, however, and you could be walking home $250 richer; the pot here is the largest of the group.

Tuesday

Baggot Inn (82 W. 3rd St., between Thompson and Sullivan sts.; ☎ 212/477-0622; quiz at 7:30pm; Q,R to 8th St., or A,E,C,B,D to W. 4th St.) has a friendly session, best for people who follow the news closely, as the emphasis here seems to be on current events (though a knowledge of rock music will also come in handy).

Wednesday

You've got to trek out to Brooklyn to play at what was the very first of the regular quiz nights. The venue is **Pete's Candy Store** (709 Lorimer St, Williamsburg, Brooklyn; ☎ 718/302-3770; www.petescandystore.com; quiz at 7:30 pm; L to Lorimer St.), a neighborhood bar that's game crazy. Every other Monday it hosts a popular spelling bee, Tuesday is bingo night, and Saturday it's Scrabble tournaments. Pop music trivia is the rage here, so if you're the sort who can name every ABBA song in the order they were released, you may well pick up the $25 bar tab that's the big prize here.

Thursday

This night belongs to **Rocky Sullivans** (129 Lexington Ave., between 28th and 29th sts.; ☎ 212/725-3871; www.rockysullivans.com; quiz starts at 9:30pm; 6 to 33rd St.), a raucous Irish pub where the quizzes are on the easy side and more pop-culture oriented, with winners getting enough drinks to put them under the table.

RUSSIAN BATHS

After a night of questions and cocktails, a little schvitz might be in order. That's Yiddish for "sweat" and it's what you'll do copiously at the **Russian & Turkish Baths** (268 E. 10th St., between First Ave. and Avenue A; ☎ 212/674-9250; www.russianturkishbaths.com; $25 admission; Sat–Sun 7:30am–10pm, Mon–Tues and Thurs–Fri 11am–10pm, Wed 9am–10pm; L to First Ave.), the last holdout from the years when the Lower East Side and the East Village were swimming in such establishments—wet clubhouses where newly arrived Eastern European immigrants (primarily) met to gossip, raise a glass of vodka, and then flush the alcohol out of their systems with a sauna. Of course, when this bathhouse was established in 1892, only men came; today, it's co-ed most of the week, with special

men-only hours on Sunday from 7:30am to 2pm and women-only on Wednesday from 9am to 2pm.

Little else has changed—the little restaurant at the front continues to dole out borscht and beer (no more vodka, sorry); and in the basement, people of all ages, nationalities, shapes, and sizes peer at one another through mists of steam and do what they've always done here: talk. And talk. And talk—about their children, about the weather, about food and politics and television. First and foremost this is a social scene, open to all, and totally different from the serenity-obsessed, beauty-promulgating spas elsewhere in the city. The facilities are defiantly old (but clean); everyone is issued the same robes and shorts, a great leveler (they're in a stack outside the dressing room); and the body obsessions that seem to haunt spas are refreshingly absent. (Women who are modest may want to bring along a bathing suit, as the armholes on these one-size-fits-all robes often reach down to the bottom of the ribcage, exposing all.)

Though you can spend your time drifting from cloudy room to room—there's a Swedish sauna, a Turkish steam room (the steam scented with lavender and eucalyptus), and another tiled steam room—to be instantly transported back to the early 1900s you'll want to opt for the *platza* treatment (an additional $35). Nicknamed "Jewish Acupuncture," it takes place in an actual Russian sauna (one of the few that exist in the United States, which is heated by 2,000 pounds of rocks that are baked in an oven overnight, giving off an intense radiant heat). You'll lie down on one of the wooden piers as an attendant scrubs/whips you with oak leaves doused in olive oil soap. The oil in the leaves is an astringent, which is then massaged in, to open your pores and cleanse your skin. Just when you're feeling utterly relaxed, the attendant douses you with frigid water. If you want to have a tale to bring home to your friends, this is it. If you're not that adventurous, you can still experience the Russian sauna. Just wander in, take a seat on one of the wooden piers, and watch someone else getting the treatment. Massages, Dead Sea salt scrubs, and black mud treatments are also available.

A TEA CEREMONY

At the bathhouse, you'll experience the old Eastern European East Village. To experience the new East Village, trade the bathhouse for a teahouse, where you'll learn about the latest immigrant group to transform the neighborhood: the Japanese. At a very authentic tea *kaiseki* (Japanese version of tapas) restaurant, **Cha An** (230 E. 9th St.; ☎ 212/228-8030; $15 per person; call in advance for reservations; 6 to Astor Place), a traditional Japanese tea ceremony is performed each Friday. It's an unusual opportunity, because in Japan a guest at such a ceremony would be expected to know *Sadu,* the correct way to take the tea, and the comments and gestures to make during the ritual.

I knew none of this, nor did my 6-year-old daughter, when we were graciously waved into the small, tatami-matted hut in the center of the restaurant by a murmuring woman in a sherbet-colored kimono. She was our hostess for the next half-hour and patiently took us through the ceremony, explaining softly that samurai performed the tea ceremony before they went into battle to center themselves, and that each move was part of the ritual, one that is deeply meshed with Zen Buddhism. We learned that the process celebrates the moment of the encounter between the host and guest, one that will never again be repeated in

just the same way. And as we ate our small treat (made of sticky rice) and drank the bitter tea, the sounds of traffic and the pace of the street retreated for that short while and all was reduced to the miniature world of the hut. It was an otherworldly way to spend a half-hour, and even my sometimes rambunctious daughter walked away calmed and refreshed by the experience.

THE GAMES LOCALS PLAY

This next experience is a classic, one of the few holdovers from the '50s and '60s Greenwich Village, when it was still a hotbed of intellectuals and would-be revolutionaries (you've seen cartoons of them, all long hair and berets). I'm speaking of chess, which is avidly played today in the small Village "Chess District" consisting of the southwest corner of Washington Square Park and the chess shops along nearby Thompson Street. Here, as they've done for decades, intense clusters of men (primarily) gather for intense games, speaking little, grunting a lot, occasionally flipping through the paper between moves, or gathering in clusters to watch as a really expert player (Grand Masters sometimes show up) takes his turn at one of the boards.

You may have seen the park players featured in the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer.* While they're fun to watch, if you want to play yourself I'd recommend going to the **Village Chess Shop** (230 Thompson St.; ☎ 212/475-9580; www.chess-shop.com; games 11am–midnight) instead, where gambling is forbidden—you can lose your shirt in the park, where those guys are sharks. Games cost a whopping $1, making this one of the cheapest pastimes in the city. Watch your temper, though: profanities incur a fine of $3. Along with selling tea, coffee, and small snacks, the Village Chess Shop has all sorts of chess sets for sale, many of them collectors' items. For more variety, be sure to check across the street at **Chess Forum** (219 Thompson St.; ☎ 212/475-2369), which is more a place for buying than playing.

Table tennis is beloved in China, and when you visit **Wang Chen Table Tennis Club** (250 W. 100th St., just off Broadway; ☎ 212/864-7235; www.wangchenttc.com; Mon–Fri 3:30–10:30pm, Sat 11am–10pm, Sun 11am–8pm; ❶,❷,❸ to 96th St.), you'll feel like you've been transported there as you watch Asian, sweat-spouting (mostly) men, women, and children pace the tables here, slamming down the balls with an intensity that would impress Andre Agassi. Arguably the best place in the nation to learn to play table tennis—the top-ranked female player in the U.S. is an instructor here, and her male colleagues are ranked 16th and 17th respectively (you gotta wonder what kind of mind games happen around the water cooler here)—Chen's is open 7 days a week and will accept short-term students. If you have just 1 hour to devote to improving your game, that's okay: $40 will buy you a session with one of these masters. It's also possible to simply drop by for a couple of games at a cost of just $8 an hour or take part in their weekly Wednesday night tournament (7:45pm, $15).

SURPRISE PARTIES . . . FOR ALL

Next is a legendary **roaming party** that pops up unexpectedly about once a month in all sorts of odd locations. One night a thousand revelers gather on a summer evening in a waterside park in Brooklyn for a renegade street festival of music, dance, and exotic partywear. Another time, a set of modern dance studios is taken

over for a night of "new circus" performances and bawdy burlesque (I attended that one and watched as a hula dancer wearing a bra made of fake skulls performed a very funny trio with her breasts . . . you had to be there). And most famously, the A train mysteriously becomes a disco at midnight, as several hundred board at a pre-arranged stop, boomboxes in hand, and boogie through the boroughs until dawn. If it sounds outrageous, it's meant to be. "In the New Lost City, you are the performer and the night is your stage," write the anonymous party-givers. "We create these events to wake the wild inside, to remind you of the infinite possibilities of your nightlife vision made real." When I recently e-mailed them to find out whether or not these fests are open to all, one of the party-throwers named Will e-mailed me back saying, "We love outsiders. In fact, I think all of us are outsiders." To find out when the next one's happening and if there's a charge (most are free, but some cost between $9 and $20 to attend), head online to **www.newlostcity.com**.

VEGAS VIA MOSCOW IN BROOKLYN

Up to this point, my "Other New York" selections have been activities that pretty much any local can engage in. The Russian nightclubs of Brooklyn are a bit different. While they're certainly open to all (and once the vodka starts flowing freely—as it will—everyone gets quite chummy), these nightclubs have a clientele that's almost entirely made up of Russian immigrants. They also have an earnestly kitschy sensibility—think showgirls with perma-grins in feathered bras and Russian-mafia-looking types boozily singing along to top-40 hits—that's quite unique. Interestingly, the clubs offer these émigrés something that doesn't really exist in their homeland: a supper club, where a lavish, multi-course meal is the opener to a night of entertainment, with a floor show and dancing until the wee hours (according to Russian friends of mine, restaurants are never dance halls in Russia; they're strictly separated).

It's not a cheap experience: A night at one of these clubs can easily run to $150 or more per couple. But I'd say it's the most worthy splurge in this book. In fact, it may well end up being your most memorable evening in the city. To keep costs in check, do what the Russians do and bring your own bottle to drink: it's allowed and will cut your final tab dramatically.

Of the dozen or so nightclubs in Brighton Beach, three are universally considered to be the finest. **Tatiana Restaurant** (3162 Brighton at 6th St.; ☎ 718/891-5151; Fri–Sun for dinner and show; Ⓑ or Ⓠ to Brighton Beach) is right on the boardwalk, so if you get there early enough you'll have the fun of walking the sand and seeing the sun set. Like the other two, it has a floor show of dancers and singers, but its entertainment (at least when I last saw it) is a bit weirder and more amateurish than the others. For top-notch entertainment, including a singer who's the Russian doppelganger of Celine Dion, there's **Rasputin** (2670 Coney Island Ave.; ☎ 212/332-8111; Fri–Sun for dinner and show; no decent public transportation options), which has the largest dining room and stage of the three, as well as the most lavish stage show, with 12 talented and enthusiastic singers and dancers, dozens of costume changes, and clever choreography (including numbers where cast members were swinging from the ceiling when I was last there). My favorite, however, is the oldest of the bunch, **The National** (2730 Brighton Beach Ave.; ☎ 718/646-1225; Fri–Sun for dinner and show; Ⓑ or Ⓠ to Brighton Beach),

which somehow best captures the joyous spirit of this community—along with top-40 and swing dancing, people in the crowd periodically request Russian folk dances, and suddenly the dance floor will be filled with men and women clasping one another's shoulders and kicking their ways across the floor. I also think its food is of the highest quality, particularly the "Russian sushi"—cholesterol-laden rolls of chopped liver wrapped in a breadlike dough that's absolutely scrumptious (the roast duck, smoked fish, and shish kebabs—all part of the set menu—are also delicious).

One note: You need to dress appropriately, or you'll feel very awkward. For men, that means suits or very upscale casual wear; women should wear an outfit they might don for an evening wedding.

HOW WE PRAY

A city that many have denounced as the next Sodom and Gomorrah, New York is in reality brimming with well-subscribed churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples of all types. Attending a service—even of a religion other than your own—is a marvelous way of meeting locals and getting a peek at the zeitgeist of that particular community.

Note: There are dozens of religious services of every stripe to attend across the city. I only have space enough for five suggestions in this section, and so have chosen five that readily accept visitors and are, to my mind at least, particularly fascinating for outsiders. If you're interested in attending another type of service, beyond those listed here, the front desk clerk at any of the city's hotels should be able to direct you to the nearest temple, synagogue, mosque, or church should you wish to pray. Or see "Other Prominent Houses of Worship," below.

A GOSPEL SERVICE IN HARLEM

I'll start with the disclaimer that this is hardly a non-touristy activity. In fact, the subway up to Harlem on Sunday mornings is a regular train car of Babel, with visitors from all over the world making the trek Uptown. Most are going to the **Abyssinian Baptist Church** (136–142 W. 138th St., between Lenox Ave. and Adam Clayton Powell Blvd.; www.abyssinian.org; Sun 9am and 11am; ❷, ❸ to 135th St.), the best-known of Harlem's churches, and a center of the African American community even today. In fact, at the service I recently attended, the new president of the NAACP spoke to the congregation, as did New York's chancellor of education. The only disappointing element of the service was the music, which was subdued and lackluster. But for those who value the word (every service includes an eloquent sermon) over the melody, there's no better place than this church, still the most important in Harlem (see p. 233 for more information on the church's architecture and history). ***One note:*** Abyssinian is extremely popular. To get into the 9am service, you'll need to arrive no later than 8:30am; and for the 11am service, arrive at 9am. If you're not a member of the congregation, you'll be placed in the visitors' line and then in a special visitors' seating section up in the balcony.

Better music, in fact seriously wonderful music, is at the heart of the services at **Canaan Baptist Church** (132 W. 116th St., off Lenox Ave.; Sun 11am; ❶ to 116th St.), where a 30-person-strong, red-robed choir is ably backed by a hot

Other Prominent Houses of Worship

Beyond the Baptist, Catholic, and Buddhist churches and temples discussed in this section, here are some notable houses of worship that hold services you may wish to attend.

Armenian Apostolic

- St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral (630 Second Ave., at 34th St.; ☎ 212/686-0710; Divine Liturgy services Sun at 10:30am). Built to resemble the Cathedral of Holy Echmidiazen (4th c.), the first cruciform church in the world, this cathedral was consecrated in 1968, the first of its kind in the U.S.

Episcopalian

- Cathedral of St. John the Divine (1047 Amsterdam Ave., at 110th St.; ☎ 212/316-7490; services Mon–Sat 8am, 8:30am, 9:30am, 12:15pm, 5:30pm; Sun at 8am, 9am, 9:30am, 11am, 6pm; 1 to 110th St.). This architectural masterpiece, still under construction (p. 171), is the largest cathedral in the world.

Hindu

- Hindu Temple Society of North America (45–57 Bowne St., Flushing; ☎ 718/460-8484; www.nyganeshtemple.org; Mon–Fri 8am–9pm, Sat–Sun 7:30am–9pm; 7 to Main St., Flushing). Dedicated to the god Ganesh, this was the first Hindu Temple built in the United States. It's still the place visited by all Indian Hindus during their first week in New York City. Dress appropriately: Those wearing shorts, ripped jeans, or very short skirts will not be admitted.

Interdenominational Christian

- Riverside Church (490 Riverside Dr., between 120th and 122nd sts.; www.theriversidechurchny.org; services Mon, Tues, and Thurs 6pm; Wed 7pm, Sun 8:15am and 10:45am; 1 to 116th St.). An architecturally important church (modeled on Chartres Cathedral in France), it's known for the progressive views of its clergy and its proudly interracial congregation.

septet of piano, organ, bass, electric guitar, organ, drums, and bongos. By the halfway point of the service, the congregation is swaying, jumping, and swooning from the weight of the emotions this non-stop music machine is pumping out (in fact, there's very little preaching here). Problem is, visitors are not admitted until after the 11am service commences, and then they are shepherded up to a steep balcony with only limited views of the stage. I have always felt very removed from the action, though the music is by far the best you'll hear anywhere.

Jewish

- Congregation Emanu-El (1 E. 65th St., off Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/744-1400; www.emanuelnyc.org; services Sun–Thurs 5:30pm, Fri 5:15pm, Sat 10:30am; Ⓡ, Ⓠ to Fifth Ave). This reformed Jewish temple boasts the largest Jewish congregation in the world. After the Saturday services there are architectural tours of the sanctuary.
- Congregation Shearith Israel (Central Park West at 70th St.; ☎ 212/873-0300; www.shearithisrael.org; services Mon–Fri 7:15am and 6:30pm, Sat 8:15am, Sun 8am; ❶ to 66th St.). This Orthodox synagogue (also known as the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue) is home to the oldest Jewish congregation in New York. I also think it's one of the loveliest houses of worship in the city.

Methodist

- Christ Church United Methodist (520 Park Ave., at 59th St.; ☎ 212/838-3036; www.christchurchnyc.org; services Wed at 7:30pm and Sun at 9am, 9:30am, and 11am). This eye-poppingly beautiful church has a Byzantine/Romanesque sanctuary adorned with seven million Venetian tiles.

Mormon

- Manhattan New York Temple (125 Columbus Ave., at 65th St.; ☎ 917/441-8220; ❶ to 66th St.). Non-Mormons not admitted to services. Call for service times.

Muslim

- The Islamic Cultural Center of New York (201 E. 96th St., at Third Ave.; ☎ 212/722-5234; Fri prayers held at 12:30pm in winter, 1pm summer; ❻ to 96th St.). This striking modern mosque was built in the mid-1980s and is very much at the center of Muslim life in the city.
- Masjid Manhattan (12 Warren St. between Church St. and Broadway; ☎ 212/866-1765; prayer services five times daily at approximately 5am, 6:30am, noon, 3pm, 5:45pm, and 7pm; Ⓡ, Ⓦ, ❹, ❺, ❻ to City Hall). Established in 1970, this was one of the pioneer mosques in New York and is busy night and day; come early for Friday services.

The most welcoming of the gospel churches is the **Greater Refuge Temple** (2081 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.; ☎ 212/866-1700; Sun 11am; ❷, ❸ to 125th St.), which has no specific area for outsiders; here guests sit side by side with parishioners. The church itself is a massive, '60s structure that looks more like an auditorium than a church, but with excellent acoustics and an enthusiastic all-male choir who make up in spirit for what they sometimes lack in talent (the choir actually is terrific, the soloists less so). Like Canaan, they, too, have a complete band grooving with the singers. And for anyone who wants to see the

holy-roller spirit of Harlem, this is the place to come, a church where the parishioners bring their own tambourines, wear elaborate hats (the women, not the men), and jump up and dance whenever the spirit calls.

A BUDDHIST TEMPLE IN CHINATOWN

At the entrance to the Manhattan Bridge, a giant smiling Buddha with a blue neon halo blesses all who approach. He presides over the largest Chinese Buddhist temple in New York, a building that once housed a kung fu movie house but now trades in serenity instead of jaguar-claw punches. Like all Buddhist temples, **Mahayana Buddhist Temple** (133 Canal St., just at the entrance to the bridge; 6, N, O, R to Canal St.) is open to all at most hours of the day. The few formal ceremonies they offer are tied to the lunar calendar and thus difficult to anticipate.

When you enter, you'll see a statue of Kwan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy (the most famous and beloved of the Buddhist deities, you may have seen her likeness at your favorite Chinese restaurant). All around her are bamboo fortune-telling sticks—100 different sticks, each with a number that will refer to a devotional story. Worshippers will ask a question—something along the lines of "Is this a good year to open a business?"—pick a stick at random, and then approach the man behind the counter, who will know what story has been referenced and will help the worshipper by giving his interpretation (only in Chinese, however). You can have a simpler and somewhat ersatz experience by asking your own question, making a donation of a dollar, and then pulling out one of the tiny paper scrolls at the entrance to the main hall.

As you enter the main hall, it's flanked on both sides with memorial pictures, surrounding the Boddhisatva of hell, the god who helps souls pass quickly through hell to be reincarnated once again (and in Chinese Buddhism, everyone is expected to spend some time atoning in hell). Family members bring offerings (the fruit that you'll see) and light incense to appease the gods. If there's a ceremony going on, you're welcome to enter quietly and attend, but don't approach the main table where the chanting takes place; and try to be respectful. You'll know a ceremony is over when the large gong is rung.

NEW YORK'S CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL

Catholics, and anyone who appreciates the solemn theatricality of the Catholic Mass, will enjoy the service at **St. Patrick's Cathedral** (Fifth Ave. between 44th and 45th sts.; ☎ 212/733-2261; Sun Mass at 7am, 8am, 9am, 10:15am, noon, 1pm, and 5:30pm; daily Masses during the week at various times; B, D to Rockefeller Center). The country's largest cathedral, it's an imposing, handsome house of worship, with the classic Rose Window (26 ft. in diameter), flying buttresses, and attenuated columns of prototypical European Gothic cathedrals. You may want to call in advance to learn at which services the choir will perform (they don't do them all), because they have a glorious one here, its sound magnified by that of a massive organ (7,855 pipes; it's in the balcony behind the congregation). Watching the service through the wavy air (from the hundreds of candles always glowing in the transepts and along the walls) and listening to the choir can be a transporting experience. ***Two small notes:*** To get a seat, you'll want to arrive at least 15 minutes in advance for any of the midday Sunday services. It's also not considered appropriate for non-Catholics to take Communion.

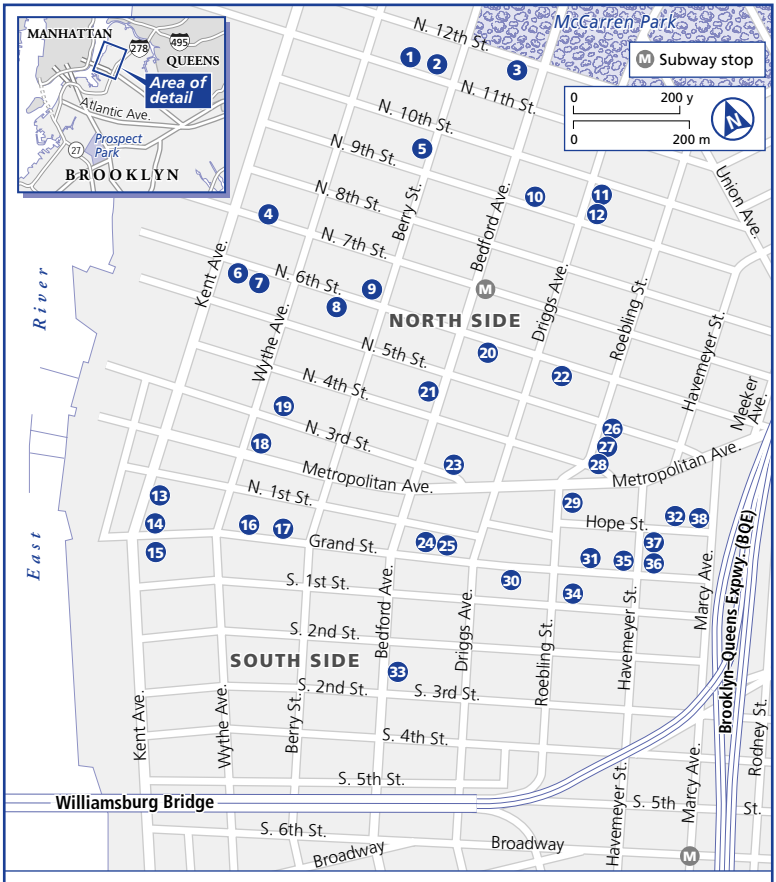
A COOL NEIGHBORHOOD STROLL

New York City's residents make a home for themselves across the five boroughs, but there are certain residential neighborhoods that offer you more than just a peek at people scurrying to the laundromat or corner deli. I've picked one particularly interesting area to recommend, as it offers a tantalizing window into how some of the most artistic among us eat, play, and live.

Colonized by cheap-rent-seeking artists in the late 1970s (the vast influx came in the early '90s), the North Side of **Willamsburg, Brooklyn** (take L to Bedford St.) is a neighborhood that's saturated with art. Formerly an industrial area, and a dangerous one at that, it's now speckled with small galleries every other block, coffee shops other than Starbucks brimming with serious 20-somethings hunched over computers, and high-design restaurants, as artful in decor as they are in food. What's charming is the home-grown nature of it all. At many other galleries, these former factory spaces are still so rough that you literally climb little mounds in the flooring to get around. Visit the **Temporary Museum of Painting** (118 N. 11th St. off Berry St.; $3 admission; Sat–Sun noon–5pm), and you'll be stepping into the cathedral-like apartment of the curator (amazing vaulted ceilings and brickwork), who will offer you mint tea as you look at the art, and ask you to pick your favorite and least favorite of the paintings so that she can share your thoughts with the artists. **Art 101** (101 Grand St. off Wythe; Fri–Mon noon–6pm; www.art101brooklyn.com) is also a home gallery, so you'll not only see the art, but get to peek at the curator's spotless kitchen and dining room (I guess you would keep it ultra-clean knowing that people will be tramping through it all day). At the **City Reliquary** (corner of Grand and Havermeyer sts.), the gallery is simply three large windows that you view from the street, filled with historical detritus of New York City, from bits of stone from famous buildings to souvenirs from ages past to pieces of wreckage from the World Trade Center—an oddball, fascinating collection and utterly of a piece with the neighborhood. Because these are emerging rather than established galleries, the prices for art are within the reach of the average Joe. I've seen wall-worthy paintings for $500, and photos for even less.

An ideal visit to the neighborhood would take place on a sunny weekend afternoon (don't visit midweek, as many of the galleries are only open weekends). Get off at the Bedford stop and immediately walk to the **Figureworks Gallery** (168 N. 6th St., off Bedford St.; www.figureworks.com; Fri–Sun 1–6pm) to see the art and pick up a copy of *WagMag,* a free gallery guide that will tell you what's on at all of the galleries (there's also a helpful map). After a few hours of gallery-hopping, stop by **Galapagos** (70 N. 6th St.; ☎ 718/782-5188; www.galapagosartspace.com) for a drink and a performance (local bands, burlesque shows, performance art, you name it), and then visit one of the area's many excellent Thai restaurants—**SEA** (114 N. 6th St; ☎ 718/384-8850) is ultra-chic, cheap, and darn good. Or if you want to continue your foray into the art world, go to **Monkey Town** (58 N. 3rd St., between Wythe and Kent sts.; ☎ 718/384-1369; Tues–Sun 4pm–midnight; L to Bedford St.), a "performance art/video art restaurant" where you dine on excellent Asian fusion food (main dishes from $12) surrounded by 20-foot-high movie screens on all four walls. As you eat, you watch video art, or live performances, or a combination of both. When I last dined there, we watched slowed-down segments from the TV show *America's Funniest Pet Videos* as a man in the center of the

Williamsburg



31 Grand **14**
Art 101 **16**
artMoving Gallery **3**
Beacon's Closet **1**
Black & White Art Gallery **11**
Capla Kesting Gallery **26**
CAVE Gallery **15**
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Joymore **30**
Klein Blue Productions **34**
LMAK Projects **7**
Lunar Base Art **25**
McCraig Wells **27**
MK Gallery **37**
Monkey Town **4**
Momenta Art **5**
Parker's Box **24**
Pierogi **10**
RealForm Project Space **21**
Riviera **18**
Sarah Bowen Gallery **22**
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room got an elaborate massage from another man. It was a unique experience, to put it mildly.

INSIDER'S TOURS

Though it may seem odd to include tours in this "Other New York" chapter, the following two experiences so successfully bridge the gap between native and tourist that they must be discussed here.

The **Big Apple Greeters** program (☎ 212/669-5159; www.bigapplegreeter.org; free) is the more straightforward of the two. It pairs friendly New Yorkers (no, that's not an oxymoron) with visitors of similar tastes and interests. After a phone discussion, the host, an unpaid volunteer, devises a 2- to 4-hour walking tour of his neighborhood or a neighborhood he knows well. The two meet at the visitor's hotel and then spend the afternoon or morning together walking the streets, and getting to know one another. For some visitors, the experience becomes a short tutorial on how to navigate the subways or pick a locals-only restaurant. Others find the experience more profound. "I was nervous about hanging out with a stranger for the afternoon, but I left feeling like I'd made a true friend," Mei Wong, a visitor from Ohio told me. "It was also so moving when we talked about 9/11 and his experiences of it. After our time together, I felt like the city was my own, like I had a better understanding of it than I ever would have gotten in my short visit."

I had a similar experience. To prepare for this book, I did a Greeters tour with a roly-poly banker from Queens named Teddy, picking an area of the city that I don't know that well: Jackson Heights. A Colombian-American, Teddy was able to offer insights into the neighborhood that I never could have gleaned on my own: the ways in which the different Hispanic groups in that neighborhood interact; the single-family homes that house four or five immigrant families; and the people who were buying the "miracle waters" sold at the local *botanicas* we passed. Even for me, a native New Yorker, the experience was an eye-opener.

Big Apple Greeters can accommodate families with children and people with disabilities, and sends visitors to every part of the five boroughs (Harlem is the most requested tour). It currently has about 350 active volunteers, but because requests often exceed that number per week, it's important to call at least 2 weeks in advance to secure a tour.

Soundwalks (www.soundwalk.com; $17 for CD at Barnes & Noble or Amazon, $12 downloadable onto an iPod from the website) is the disembodied version of the Greeters program. Here, too, you have a native New Yorker squiring you around the city's most interesting neighborhoods, but in this case your companion is in your head, his voice coming through your headphones from an iPod or CD player. The speaker is backed by appropriate music and sound effects. And your guide is a provocateur, a scamp, an adventurer, wheedling you to go into places you normally wouldn't dare enter. "We are living in such a well-planned way," says founder Stephen Crasneanski, "We don't really push ourselves to try new things. So when we have a chance to step out of our lives for 10 minutes, push a door that we wouldn't normally push, that's a strong experience. These Soundwalks bring you places where you'd never normally go."

That's certainly so. In the four Soundwalks I have tried, I:

- keyed in a door code to get into a forbidding-looking building in Brooklyn, and then keyed in another code to take the elevator up for a spectacular view of the Manhattan bridge;
- stood on tiptoe to peer through a grated window at a sculptor hard at work, the narration telling me who the man was;
- descended a flight of stairs from the sidewalk and under a shop into a litter-strewn back alley, to the site of owner Meyer Lansky's notorious speak-easy (now a secret bar for hipsters);
- and surreptitiously entered a crumbling Chinatown tenement, to peer through the cracks in a second-floor door at the former Chinese Mafioso who plays mahjongg there on a daily basis.

My heart was pounding each time, the scary music and sound-effects in my ear blurring the line between reality and fiction. Suddenly, I wasn't just on a walking tour, I was starring in my own thriller.

These are the hallmarks of the Soundwalks genre, which plays up all of the adrenalin-pumping aspects of New York City—the danger, the sex, and the greed (in the Wall St. walk), in a way that may sometimes be exaggerated, but is certainly never dull. The series, which has grown each year since it was founded in 2001, now features walks to nearly every neighborhood you'd want to explore and some you might not have considered, including Chinatown (my favorite walk), Wall Street, Ground Zero, the East Village, Times Square, Little Italy, the Meat-Packing District, DUMBO (Brooklyn), Hasidic Williamsburg (one version for men, one for women), and the Bronx.

7 Sports & Relaxation in a Tense Town

In parks and stadiums, indoors and out

THOUGH GOTHAM MAY SEEM ALWAYS TO BE ON THE GO GO GO, THE opportunities for restful and relaxing pursuits are surprisingly numerous. The five boroughs of New York have more than 2,700 acres of parks, playgrounds, beaches, and other assorted recreation facilities—more "green" spaces than in any other city of the United States.

If you prefer to watch from the sidelines rather than swing for the fences, the city is one of the best in the world for spectator sports. Gotham boasts not one, but two adored (and despised—especially if you hail from Boston) major league baseball teams in the Yankees and the Mets. Gridiron fans will find two major football teams (though, ironically, both actually play their games in neighboring New Jersey)—the Giants and the Jets. Local pro-basketball fans flock to the down-on-their-heels Knicks and the WNBA's spectacularly good Liberty. And the N.Y. Rangers, the local hockey team, has the supernatural effect of turning ordinary fans into raving lunatics the minute they hit Madison Square Garden. Although going to a game won't be as relaxing a pastime as a park visit, it is a great way to blow off steam and meet locals (be sure to root for the home team), and is thus another highly recommended NYC experience.

CENTRAL PARK, THE CLASSIC GREEN

Central Park ★★★ (60th St. to 105th St., between Fifth Ave. and Central Park West; ☎ 212/360-6600 for recorded info or 212/628-1036 for live help; www.centralparknyc.org; free admission; too many subway stops to list) is the logical starting place for this discussion, Manhattan's 843-acre oasis that is the yin to the city's neon, concrete, and office tower yang. It serves as the city's backyard, its concert hall, its daytime pick-up bar and, in the summer, when dozens don bathing suits to soak up the rays, its green beach. The marvel of the park, besides its size (a full 6% of the total area of Manhattan), is its ability to provide just the right sort of experience for the myriad of very different personalities who think of it as their own. I think it's that flexibility, that chameleon-like quality, that makes it such an interesting place for visitors to tour. Seeing it from an outsider's perspective, it's much easier to recognize what a great mirage and paradox the park is.

Because, let's face it, very little here is natural. Every tree, every shrub, every lake and most of the rolling hills were designed, planted, or blasted into existence by landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux back in the 1850s, and their efforts still shape our experiences today. These two geniuses took

a 2½-mile tract of swampland, farms, and suburban towns and created an Arcadia that had no resemblance whatever to what had come before. Below the park, 95 miles of drainage pipes were installed, many to both fill and periodically empty the four lakes that were created; at ground level the site was transformed using six million bricks, 65,000 cubic tons of gravel, 26,000 trees, and 250,000 shrubs. Even the dirt was imported; the natural topsoil was so poor that 500,000 cubic feet of topsoil was shipped in from New Jersey. As Olmsted once wrote, "Every foot of the park, every tree and bush, every arch, roadway and walk, has been fixed where it is with a purpose."

And what was that purpose? No less than the health of the city. Those who rallied for its creation felt that it was crucial to create a place where New Yorkers could blow off steam, get away from the stresses of urban life. Moreover, Olmsted wanted to create a park that would be a bridge between classes. "There need to be places and time for re-unions," Olmsted wrote, "[where] the rich and the poor, the cultivated and the self-made, shall be attracted together and encouraged to assimilate." Though that didn't happen when the park was first finished—it was too far from the homes of poor New Yorkers for them to visit it—that ideal was realized when the city itself began to wrap around the park, making it finally a true *central* park.

In your own strolls around the park, you'll encounter three different types of landscapes: pastoral vistas, such as the Sheep's Meadow, which are meant to invoke a cultivated countryside; primitive portions where dense forestation shuts out any view of the city; and the promenade zones, which were once used by the city's aristocracy as an extension of their parlors, a place to strut and be seen. An ideal visit here will include all three and I've created a relatively brief list of highlights, along with the activities you can engage in once in the park, that should allow you to do just that. Feel free to ignore the following list altogether and just wander the curving paths of the park, exploring its hidden nooks, surprise vistas, ball fields, and dog runs. There's no right way to see or do this park; you'll enjoy yourself however you approach it.

CENTRAL PARK HIGHLIGHTS

- Actually two zoos in one—an interactive kids' zoo and the zoo for all ages—the relatively small **Central Park Zoo** ★ (between 62nd and 66th sts., right off Fifth Ave.; see p. 174 for full details) is one of the oldest zoos in the U.S. A few years back, one of its polar bears made national headlines when he was treated for obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression. The cure: All the bears now hunt for their food, which is hidden daily. You can watch them do so when you visit.
- Completed in 1871, **The Dairy** (at roughly 65th St. a short walk into the park from the zoo), a frou-frou laden Gothic structure, was an actual dairy set up to give city children access to fresh milk. Today it serves as the park's visitor center. Most of the Central Park Conservancy's tours (p. 178) start from this point. From the dairy you should be able to see **Wollman Rink** ★ (☎ 212/439-6900; www.wollmanskatingrink; mid-Oct to mid-Apr; admission $8.50 adults, $4.50 seniors and children, skate rental $4.75), a wonderfully scenic place to skate. (You may remember it from the movie *Love Story.*) In

the summer, the rink is transformed into a mini-amusement park called Victorian Gardens.

- **The Carousel** ✯ (at approximately 65th St., in the dead center of the park; Apr–Nov 10am–6pm, Dec–Mar 10am–4:30pm; $1 per ride), a Victorian spinner, is most children's favorite park stop (it certainly is my daughters'). Though it's not the original carousel (the first burned down in the 1950s), it's a beaut, built in Coney Island in 1908, and featuring some of the tallest merry-go-round horses in the United States. It's also a much more humane carousel than the original, which was rotated by a blind mule and horse toiling in the basement.
- **Sheep Meadow** (between 64th and 68th streets, towards the west side) is the premier see-and-be-seen spot for New York's teenagers, who turn this expanse of grass into a sunbathing party come spring and summer. They're following a long tradition: This is where New York's hippie "be in," a day of non-political grooviness created by Abbie Hoffman, took place in 1967. The meadow got its name in 1864 when park commissioners set sheep to graze here in an attempt to stop the First Division of the NY National Guard from using the meadow as a parade ground (it didn't work). In 1934 the sheep were exiled to Prospect Park in Brooklyn.

  Just next to Sheep Meadow, to the West, is **Tavern on the Green** (Central Park West at 67th St.; www.tavernonthegreen; ☎ 212/873-3200), a rococo restaurant with terrible food and service, but an interior that is among the most romantic in the city (stop by for ballroom dancing Saturday nights in the summer). It's interesting to note that this extremely expensive restaurant was originally the smelly sheepfold for the meadow next door.
- In their original plans for the park, Olmsted and Vaux called the area known today as **The Mall** (just east of Sheep Meadow, between 62nd and 68th, approximately), the Promenade, an "open air hall of reception." Today when you visit you'll be greeted by a grand elm tree-lined walkway bedecked with statues. At its Uptown end is an underused band shell, and west of that is one of the park's premier party places: an unofficial roller-blading rink where regulars dance-skate for hours each weekend to blasting disco music. It's quite a scene. **Bethesda Terrace** ✯✯ is at the Uptown end of the mall (just across the road) and is, without a doubt, the architectural heart of the park. You're likely to see a bride or two here, as many use this extraordinarily lovely area of the park as a backdrop for wedding photographs (the practice is particularly common among Chinese-American couples). If you approach it from The Mall, you'll come to a ravishingly carved gate with symbols representing day and night (the side with the witch on a broom is "night"). Take a look as well at the carvings on the stairs down to the fountain area; they represent the four seasons, and no two are alike. Bethesda Fountain was erected to celebrate the opening of the Croton Aqueduct, which finally solved New York's water problems in 1842. Sculpted by Emma Stebbins, the first woman to receive this type of commission from the city, the statue represents the angel Bethesda. She blesses the water with one hand, carrying a lily—the symbol of purity—in the other.

- Added to the park in 1874, **Loeb Boathouse** ★ (approximately 74th St., off Park Dr.; ☎ 212/517-2233; boat rentals: $10 1st hr., $2.50 every 15 min. thereafter) is where you rent the boats that you see bobbing on the lake. It's also the best place in the park to eat, with a decent fast-food counter and a very good (and more expensive) restaurant, for which you'll need a reservation. Carrie and Mr. Big, of *Sex and the City,* fell into the water together at the end of a disastrous date on the dock that pushes forward from the cafe.
- Darting west for a second to 72nd Street just off Central Park West is **Strawberry Fields,** a memorial to John Lennon, who was shot to death in front of the Dakota apartment house (1 W. 72nd St.) just across the street. A mosaic spells out "Imagine" on the ground; many come here to play music and leave flowers.
- Back on the East Side at around 74th Street, you'll find the **Conservatory Waters** ★, the model boat pond where Stuart Little had his fabled race. Here you can rent a model boat to float around (via remote control), take a look at the Hans Christian Andersen statue (where storytelling takes place on weekends in summer), or visit the Alice in Wonderland statue, an artistic jungle gym for the city's youth.
- Walk further into the center of the park to **Belvedere Castle,** Olmsted and Vaux's "folly" (or fantasy building), a turreted castle that sits atop the second-highest elevation in the park. Inside is a nature observatory with good rainy-day activities for children. In front of the castle is the **Delacorte Theater** (☎ 212/539-8500; www.publictheater.org; free), where the famed **Shakespeare in the Park** is performed, a star-studded and free evening of theater staged in the summer months only. If you decide to take in a show, know that you could end up spending 4 or more hours standing in line to get tickets; they're passed out at 1pm in front of the theater, but depending on the popularity of the show, crowds have been known to show up hours before that, and even camp overnight at the gate to the park. From Belvedere, you'll also look down on the **Great Lawn,** which has gone through a number of incarnations, first as a reservoir and later in the 1930s as "Hooterville," the shantytown where hundreds of homeless families lived out the Depression. Today it's most famous as a concert space: Simon and Garfunkel reunited here in the early 1980s in a widely televised concert.
- **Cleopatra's Needle** ★★ is next. The obelisk standing near the Metropolitan Museum of Art was a gift to the United States from Egypt in 1881, in recognition of the help this country gave in the construction of the Suez Canal. Transporting the 200-ton pillar took 38 days from Alexandria to New York by ship, and then another 144 just to get it from the Hudson River to Central Park. It originally stood at the Temple of the Sun in Heliopolis, and is believed to have been erected in 1600 B.C. The Romans moved it in the 12th century to the front of a temple built by Cleopatra, hence the name. Look for the plaque at the base, which translates the hieroglyphics.
- Far Uptown at 105th Street and Fifth Avenue is the park's only formal gardens, the **Conservatory Gardens** ★, and they're simply stunning. Each of the gardens' three sections was designed in the style of a different country (France, England, and Italy). Another major spot for wedding photographers (and weddings, for that matter), there are few more fragrant and lovely places in the city.

Central Park, in Brief

A word on playgrounds: With a few exceptions, most of the park's playgrounds are located on the rim of the park near the entrances. They tend to pop up every 5 blocks or so, with some of the more elaborate playgrounds located on the south end of the park (which was conceived as the children's side of the park because it was nearer to where the lower income families would have lived at the time of the park's opening).

Transportation within the park: The park is open to car traffic on weekdays only from morning to mid-afternoon. At other times, the park is a haven for cyclists and it's quite easy to rent a bike at the Loeb boathouse (see above) for $9 to $15 per hour. Outside the park, you can rent bikes most conveniently at **Eddie's Bicycle Shop** (490 Amsterdam Ave., at 83rd St.; ☎ 212/580-2011; www.eddiesbicycles.com; $35 per day, $10 per hr.) or at **Metro Bicycles** (1311 Lexington Ave., at 88th St.; ☎ 212/427-4450; $35 per day, $45 overnight, $7 per hr.).

Wildlife in the park: Birdwatchers from all over the city flock to the park for the variety of species it hosts, the most coveted sightings being of the endangered red-tailed hawks that make their nest on Woody Allen's Fifth Avenue building (at Fifth Ave. and 74th St.).

Though the places I list above are just a few of the wonders of the park, there are many others. And many may feel familiar if you're American. Central Park was and remains the most influential piece of landscape architecture in the United States; and many parks around the country were directly copied from this one.

OTHER MANHATTAN PARKS

Central Park was not the only green space Olmsted and Vaux created in New York City. In fact, many consider Prospect Park in Brooklyn (see below) and **Riverside Park** (72nd to 158th sts. along the Hudson River; www.nycgovparks.org) to be their true masterworks. As its name suggests, Riverside Park has always had one advantage over Central Park: glorious river views. Many of the garden-laced promenades make the most of these vistas, as does the lovely boat basin and rotunda area at 79th Street (go to p. 287 to read up on the bar that enlivens summer evenings here). As in Central Park, there is a smattering of playgrounds; a skate park with assorted ramps and half-pipes; and a handful of monuments, including Grant's Tomb, the largest mausoleum in the United States at 8,100 square feet. (And the answer to who's buried in Grant's tomb is: No one. Ulysses S. Grant and his wife are not buried; their sarcophagi lie aboveground.)

Just behind the New York Public Library, **Bryant Park** (40th to 42nd sts., between Sixth Ave. and the back of the library; Ⓑ, Ⓓ, Ⓕ, Ⓥ to 42nd St.; www.bryantpark.org) is a welcome respite from the endless high-rises and crushing crowds of Midtown, a 4-acre lawn surrounded by London plane tree–shaded promenades (like the Tuilleries Gardens in Paris), benches, and statuary. It's notable for its extensive programs of public concerts, movies, and even book

loans. Weather permitting, a small "reading room" is set up outdoors on the 42nd Street side of the block Monday through Saturday from 11am to 5pm, with movable furniture; kiosks with loaner books, periodicals, and children's books (no library card or ID is required); and free WiFi connection for those who want to use this tiny outdoor library to get on the Internet. From roughly May through October, the Sixth Avenue end of the park is set up as a stage, where Broadway performers are often invited to give concerts, free movies are shown in the summer (Mon nights), and other events are held. In 2005, for the first time, a small "pond" was erected in winter for free ice-skating; it stood where the tents for Fashion Week (p. 308) usually do. On the 40th Street side is **Le Carousel** ($1.50 per ride, Mon–Fri 12:30–6:30pm, Sat–Sun 11am–6pm, weather permitting), an elegant little merry-go-round that spins to the sounds of French cabaret music. A good spot for a picnic, Bryant Park has an excellent sandwich kiosk, **'wichcraft,** a branch of the downtown sandwich specialist (p. 81). There are also two pricey, so-so restaurants on the north side of the park (go for picturesque drinks, but not dinner).

The spirit of the 1960s is still very much alive in two downtown New York parks that have been havens for protesters and folk singers for many decades. I'm speaking of **Union Square Park** (14th to 18th sts. between Broadway and Union Park East; 4, 5, 6, L, N, Q, R to Union Sq.) and **Washington Square Park** (R, W to 8th St., or A, B, C, D, E, F to W. 4th St.). Union Square Park's tradition of political activism goes back to the first Labor Day Parade in 1882, which ended in the park. Since that time, it has become soap box central, a place where orators come on a daily basis to blast whatever current administration is in power, weighing in on all the big topics of the day. Beyond these individual speakers, masses of people regularly congregate here to protest. In 1927, 5,000 peaceful marchers gathered to decry the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti; in 2001, several thousand gathered here in anti-war protests; and masses of bike riders regularly gather here to stage impromptu—and illegal—mass rides through the city to call attention both to what they call the city's unfair traffic laws, and the importance of turning to more ecologically conscious forms of transportation. A statue of Gandhi, a gift of the Indian people, calmly watches over these proceedings, a fresh wreath of flowers always draped about his neck. The 14th Street side of the park where these politicos gather each day is an electrically charged spot and a truly mesmerizing scene to witness.

Along with the political folk, Union Square hosts the finest **greenmarket** in the city (on the western side of the park) every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Most days you'll find about 100 vendors hawking locally grown produce, organic wines, cider, flowers, artisan cheeses, even gourmet pickles. It's a lot of fun to visit. Three playgrounds, a dog run, a very fine equestrian statue of George Washington, and a warm-weather bar/restaurant (p. 287) are also on site.

While only intermittently political, **Washington Square Park** (at the downtown end of Fifth Ave. 2 blocks below 8th St.; 6 to Astor Place, R, Q to 8th St., or A, B, C, D, E, F, E to W. 4th St.) is nothing if not tuneful and this has long been a place for amateur musicians to gather in groups, lugging along instruments for impromptu concerts each weekend. The round fountain in the center of the park serves as a stage for a dozen-or-so regular comedians, acrobats, impressionists, and dancers who are good enough to draw crowds of 100 people or more

to their sidewalk shows. These go on year-round on weekends and often on Thursday and Friday afternoons as well, depending on the weather.

Entertaining as well are the intense chess matches (p. 195) played in Washington Square Park from noon to sundown on the southwest corner of the park (the regulars here are real sharks). Children will enjoy the two playgrounds on the north side of the park, and watching the bocce ball players practice their ancient game on the south side of the park.

For information on Washington Square's long and eclectic history, go to p. 242 in chapter 8.

Tompkins Square Park (Avenues A to B between 7th and 10th sts.; L to First Ave.) probably rates as New York's funkiest outdoor space. It's seen its share of political protests—in 1988 a stand-off between police and the homeless living here culminated in 5 days of small-scale rioting and charges of police brutality—but today it's better known for the very free expression it gives a home to. It's here every summer that "Wigstock" is held (a drag version of Woodstock, see p. 310), as well as art shows and August's Howl Festival, a spiky mix of spoken word performances and music, often political in nature. Best is the daily sidewalk catwalk of pierced, tattooed, fashion-forward locals—from punk to slacker to new boho, you'll see all sorts of fashion statements parading by. Incorporated as a park in 1878, Tompkins Square has a number of meditative green spaces, four playgrounds, a swimming pool, and a scattering of undistinguished monuments.

At the southernmost tip of Manhattan, **Battery Park** (West St. to Chambers St. on the Hudson River; www.bpcparks.org; 4, 5 to Battery Park) has been growing kudzulike for the past several decades and is now really a string of eclectic park spaces that hug the waterfront from just above the original Battery Park (where the ferry terminal for the Statue of Liberty is located) all the way up to Chambers Street. To read about the history of the original "battery," check out the walking tour on p. 221; there are a number of stirring war monuments to peruse. Walking Uptown from the original battery, you'll encounter expansive lawns, a promenade along the river that runs the length of the park, brand-new playgrounds, and a yacht marina. My favorite parts of the park are the South Cove (on the Esplanade between First and Third places), an artfully varied collection of quays, bridges, and meandering walkways with great river views; and the Irish Hunger Memorial, a grassy outcropping direct from Ireland, complete with a real Irish stone fence.

VISIT-WORTHY PARKS IN THE BRONX & BROOKLYN

Right next to the Brooklyn Museum, **Brooklyn Botanical Gardens** (1000 Washington Ave. at Empire Blvd.; ☎ 718/623-7200; $5 adults, $3 seniors and students; Apr–Nov Tues–Fri 8am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm, Oct–Mar closes daily at 4:30pm; B, Q to Prospect Park, or 2, 3 to Eastern Pkwy.) is not only one of those necessary green safety valves, it's also quite an innovative garden in many ways. It was the first in the world to have a "children's garden," allowing local kids to develop green thumbs (it's still here, along with a fun play area for youngsters). There's also a "fragrance garden" for sight-impaired visitors, where everyone is encouraged to sniff and touch the plants; and an authentic Japanese garden, complete with a large pond, pagodas, and plants from that area of the world. The best

time of year to visit is spring, when the gardens' many cherry trees are in bloom, though there are seasonal displays, both outdoors and in the on-site greenhouses, year-round.

An equal to the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens in both scope and interest, the **New York Botanical Gardens** ★ (Bronx River Pkwy., at Fordham Rd.; ☎ 718/817-8700; $13 adults, $11 seniors and students, $5 children; Apr–Oct Tues–Sun 10am–6pm, Nov–Mar Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; D, 4 to Bedford Park Blvd.) boasts the world's largest Victorian greenhouse; a brand-new "home gardening" section with classes and demonstrations for all the green thumbs out there; a children's garden and play center; and a 50-acre native forest. If there's any difference between the two gardens—they're both wonderful—it may be the wealth of hands-on programming here. Other than that, if you're interested in visiting one of these world-class gardens, you have a difficult choice to make.

A forest grows in Brooklyn, or at least it does in **Prospect Park** ★★ (at Grand Army Plaza; www.prospectpark.org; 2, 3 to Grand Army Plaza, F to Seventh Ave., Q to Parkside Ave., B to Prospect Park), the 575-acre greensward that many consider to be Frederick Law Olmsted's and Calvert Vaux's true masterpiece. While not as large as Central Park, it has nearly as many attractions, including a large lake where people pedal boats when the weather is agreeable; its own small zoo; the 90-acre Long Meadow (thought to be the largest meadow of any city park in the nation); a carousel; an ice-skating rink; and the nation's first urban Audubon Center, which is a wellspring of nature classes for both adults and children, year-round.

RECREATIONAL CENTERS FOR ALL SORTS OF SPORTS

Back in Manhattan, **Bowlmor Lanes** (110 University Place, between 12th and 13th sts.; ☎ 212/255-8188; www.bowlmor.com; $7.45–$8.95 per game, depending on hour, $5 for shoe rental; Mon 11am–3am, Tues–Wed 11am–1am, Thurs 11am–2am, Fri–Sat 11am–4am, Sun 11am–midnight; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, L to Union Sq.) is an outstanding U.S. bowling alley that's also one of the oldest, having opened in 1938. That means dozens of people daily try to jam into a fairly small facility, with the result that lines can sometimes snake onto the street. Once inside, it's tremendous fun, from its "Down with Love"–style decor, to Monday's Night Strike party, which features glow-in-the-dark pins and a deejay spinning house music (unlimited bowling and shoe rental cost $20).

Chelsea Piers (between 23rd and 19th sts. at the Hudson River; ☎ 212/336-6800; www.chelseapiers.org; C, E to Eighth Ave.) is New York's premiere indoor sports and recreation center—it really has no rival—located along the waterfront on the former luxury piers where the *Titanic* would have docked had she completed her voyage. Overhauled in the mid-'90s at a cost of $100 million, Chelsea Piers offers nearly every type of sports opportunity there is, but because many of these options are only available to those taking classes or members of the competitive leagues here, I'll list only those that are open to the short-term visitor. They are:

- **Bowling:** At the state-of-the-art **AMF Bowling** (☎ 212/835-2695; $5.50–$8.25 per person, per game, depending on the time of day; $4.50 for shoe

rental), there are 40 lanes. In the evenings, management cranks up the pop music, puts out Day-Glo pins, and starts swirling the laser lights, making this a real party place. It's not as chic a place to bowl as the **Bowlmor Lanes** (see above)—yes, even bowling can be chic in New York—but it's more spacious than its rival and well maintained.

- **Golf: The Golf Club at Chelsea Piers** ($20 for 80–118 balls depending on the time of day; Oct–Mar 6:30am–11pm, Apr–Sept 6am–midnight) is perhaps the most popular attraction at the Piers and is crowded night and day. A 15-story-high net encloses the 200-yard driving range, which juts into the Hudson River on a pier, for some of the most scenic swinging anywhere in the state. The area for the players is covered and heated, meaning it's possible to tee off in all sorts of weather (though the range usually does close when it snows or during heavy rainstorms). In addition, the club has two swing-simulator booths where you can improve your play with a lesson.
- **Skating:** Three types of skating are offered at Chelsea Piers: in-line, roller and, of course, ice skating. **Sky Rink** (☎ 212/336-6100; $10 adults, $7.50 children; $5 skate rental) is the spot for ice skating—two massive indoor rinks that are open year-round, though most of their schedules are taken up by hockey leagues and ice-skating classes. Open skating is offered in the afternoons only, though if getting roughed up is your idea of a fun Saturday night, there's an open adult hockey game every Saturday beginning at 10:30pm. (Readers interested in outdoor ice-skating should go to p. 138 for information on the rink at Rockefeller Center; and p. 206 for details on Wollman Rink in Central Park.) For bladers and skateboarders there's an outdoor roller-skating rink (regulation size) and a skate park with ramps, half-tubes, and the like. These are open only during warm-weather months.

Claremont Riding Academy (175 W. 89th St., between Columbus and Amsterdam aves.; ☎ 212/724-5100; www.potomachorse.com/clarmont.htm; rental $55 per hour; Mon–Wed 6:30am–10pm, Thurs–Fri 6:30am–9pm, Sat–Sun 8am–5pm; 1, C to 86th St.) is special. The oldest continuously operated stable in the United States (or so the folks here claim), Claremont opened in 1892. In the second half of the 20th century it began devoting itself to lessons and renting horses for trots in nearby Central Park. The mounts are of good quality, and seeing the park by horse is the height of luxury (though you can't be self-conscious, as you will draw a lot of stares and sometimes comments). The stable will only rent to those who qualify as intermediate-level English-style riders; those who don't can take a lesson, but at $55 for only a half-hour, the cost may well be prohibitive (and you'll need to book longer than a half-hour simply to get out of the stables and into the park.)

NEW YORK'S OUTSTANDING SPECTATOR SPORTS

When it comes to spectator sports, New York's die-hard fans can rarely be called "spectators." They yell, they stomp, they jerk forward as a ball is being hit or caught—in short, they're almost as entertaining to watch as the game itself. While we don't have the same level of hooliganism as the Brits do, the passions run just as high. Attending a game—particularly baseball, hockey, or football—is an adrenalin-pumping experience (especially if the home team wins) and highly recommended.

BASEBALL

It's been 5 l-o-o-o-ng years without a title for the New York Yankees and if you listen closely, you may hear the sound of quiet weeping in some quarters of the city. The star power of A-Rod, Jeter, Matsui, and Giambi is keeping seats filled nonetheless: So if you're planning to enjoy a session at **Yankee Stadium** (161st St. and River Ave., Bronx; ☎ 718/293-6000; 4, B, D to Yankee Stadium; www.yankees.com), purchase tickets online at the Yankees site well in advance; you'll also skip the line at the stadium that way, as you can print out your own ticket. If you don't have that much forethought (or a printer), it's usually possible to get bleacher seats on the day of a game for about $12, and that's the best way to experience our, ahem, outspoken fans up-close-and-personal. There are no longer the same types of problems with drunkenness as existed a decade ago (the stadium now stops selling beer after the sixth inning) but things can get rowdy. The "House that Ruth Built" doesn't have a bad seat in it, but if you'd like something a bit closer in than the bleachers, I'd recommend the Upper Deck behind home plate, rather than front row outfield. It's cheaper ($20 vs. $35), you get a more panoramic view and, best of all, it usually sells out later. Attempting to get anything closer to the action may be futile, as those seats are usually sold out far in advance to season ticket holders—but you might try StubHub (see "StubHub," below). Very occasionally you'll see discount coupons for the games in the *Daily News,* but these are rare and usually only for early-season games.

Persons visiting New York out of season (baseball is played Apr–Oct) can still visit this historic 1923 stadium on one of the **near-daily tours** ($14 adults, $7 for students and children) which take visitors into the clubhouse, the dugout, the press box, and Monument Park (where the team's historic greats are commemorated), and then right onto the field. Tours usually begin at 11am; a schedule is posted on the Yankees website (see above).

New York's secondary baseball team (and I know I'll receive angry letters for that disrespect) is the **Mets.** You can catch their home games at **Shea Stadium** (123–01 Roosevelt Ave., Flushing, Queens; ☎ 718/507-TIXX; 7 to Willets Point/Shea Stadium; www.newyork.mets.mlb.com), and because their record doesn't usually compare with that of the Yanks, you shouldn't have problems getting a seat for their games. Cheap seats go for between $5 and $18 depending on the game; to get out of the nosebleeds expect to pay between $18 and $38 per seat.

One other oddball place to watch games is Central Park, especially if you're into celebrity-spotting. Every Thursday afternoon from May through September, the Broadway Show league plays softball at the diamonds just south and to the east of Tavern on the Green. Along with techies and unknown chorus guys and gals, Denzel Washington, Matthew Broderick, and Hugh Jackman have played here during their turns on the Great White Way.

BASKETBALL

As any basketball fan knows, the **Knicks** (www.nyknicks.com) have suffered a huge decline over the past few years, and though fans hope that new coaching will bring about a revival, many have simply stopped attending games altogether. Which is good news for you, the visiting sports fan, as it means that you should be able to stroll up to the window at **Madison Square Garden** (Seventh Ave., between 31st

and 33rd sts.; ☎ 212/465-6741; www.thegarden.com; Ⓐ, Ⓒ, Ⓔ, ❶, ❷, ❸ to 34th St.) and snag a good seat the day of the game at a reasonable price. The key here is to check the seating map carefully before you buy. There will often be $12 upticks in price for seats that are only a row apart and have an identical view of the action. The cheapest seats start at just $10 (and whenever you see Spike Lee courtside, know that either he or his publicist paid upwards of $2,000 for those seats).

For higher quality basketball, at even cheaper prices, you want to go with the dames. The **New York Liberty** are a gaggle of high-jumping, fast-scoring, strategy-savvy women led by such All-Stars as Becky Hammon and Elena Baranova. They play in the summer months May through fall. Bring your daughter and get a seat for just $8 at the top of the stadium, $14 to $24 a little farther down. Courtside seats are just $65 at these games.

FOOTBALL

The Meadowlands (50 State Rte. 100, Rutherford, NJ; ☎ 201/935-3900; www.meadowlands.com) is the stadium the **NY Jets** (www.nyjets.com) share with the **NY Giants** (www.nygiants.com), and because both teams usually play only eight games a season in their home stadium, games always sell out. The solution? You can show up and try to purchase a ticket on the spot from a scalper, but I'd turn instead to sites such as StubHub (see "StubHub," above) where fans trade tickets and stick within the legal $5 mark-up on price. When you're searching for a seat, take the weather into account. If it looks like it's going to be an ugly day, sacrifice the panoramic view for a more sheltered seat in the covered lower level. Blue skies and balmy breezes? Go with the upper level, which will give you a bigger view of the game (for less money, usually). More than 45 million fans have attended games here since the stadium opened in 1976.

HOCKEY

Hockey's another terrifically popular sport in the Big Apple (Canadian ex-pats perhaps?), with arguably the rowdiest fan base of the lot (so expect some shenanigans if you go to a game). **New York Rangers** games tickets tend to go quickly, and games do sell out. The top ticket price for a game at Madison Square Garden is a whopping $634, but it's possible to pay much, much less in the upper level, where seats start at $27. Home games are played at **Madison Square Garden** (for stadium details, see "Basketball," above).

StubHub

An auction site for sporting events tickets, **StubHub** (www.stubhub.com) out-eBays eBay in this realm, usually offering more sporting events tickets at better rates than its larger competitor. And because the site gives a small percentage of the resale price to the sports teams involved, these transactions can in no way be construed as scalping. In fact, StubHub guarantees that the tickets will be usable. This is a top resource for game tickets, even for near-sold-out sporting events.

MARATHONS

The New York City Marathon is one of NY's most exciting yearly spectacles and one of the world's great marathons, drawing 35,000 competitors. Runners visit each borough, crossing the finish line in Central Park, near Tavern on the Green, at approximately 68th Street. In 2005, the marathon had its most dramatic finish ever, with the two top men running together the entire course and crossing the line just one second apart. The marathon always takes place the first Sunday in November, beginning in the early morning, though you'll often see stragglers finishing up just as the sun is setting. You can see the marathon in many parts of Manhattan and in the other boroughs (go to the website to see the full route), but my favorite place to watch it is at Cat Hill in Central Park at approximately 76th Street, right off East Side Drive (you'll recognize it from the sculpture of the wild cat on the hill). It's not too crowded, and because it's at the top of a hill, you'll witness the heroic efforts of runners who have already gone nearly 26 miles, fighting to climb this last obstacle and finish the race.

TENNIS

Once a year, Gotham becomes the center of the tennis universe as thousands of fans descend on the Arthur Ashe Tennis complex for the **U.S. Open** (Corona Park, Queens; 7 to Shea Stadium; www.usopenseries.com). And once you're in the gate, it's tennis lifestyle all the way, from the Polo store set up on the grounds, to fancy food courts dishing up sushi and pad Thai, to the 18 smaller courts where those who just happen to wander by can sometimes watch Roger Federer, Andy Roddick, Lindsay Davenport, and the Williams sisters in their preliminary matches or warming up once the semi-finals and finals are on. In fact you'll get the best views on the outside courts during the opening days of the tournament; the cheap seats in the main stadium are true nosebleeds, and though you won't have to contend with vendors clogging the aisles and blocking your view, you may want to invest in a pair of binoculars or opera glasses if you sit at the top.

The Open is played over the course of 2 weeks, starting at the end of August (on Aug. 28 in 2006) and not surprisingly, it's much easier to get tickets to the first week of play before the small fry have been weeded out. On the first 2 days, stadium seats cost as little as $22; later, the lowest prices for stadium seating will be in the $50-to-$60 range for the cheapest seats, up to $80 for the finals. Grounds passes are sold for the first week for about $45. These special tickets allow holders to roam the smaller courts and see as many preliminary matches as their hearts desire.

Tickets go on sale in early June (Amex holders and United States Tennis Association members get first crack at them), but except for the finals, the U.S. Open rarely sells out. You should be able to get seats or grounds passes for the first week within that week; for second-week play, you'll need to book ahead (2–3 weeks, to be safe).

8 Walkabouts

Enjoy a unique curbside view of the city's life and history

WHY SHOULD YOU CONSIDER TAKING WALKING TOURS OF MANHATTAN? Because they are a different sort of experience, each offering special rewards. They introduce you to the history of the city, up close and personal. They reveal the special essence of the city, and create memories that will last long after you have returned home. And unlike the motorcoach tours or a sightseeing boat, they introduce you to all this slowly and at your own speed. You teach yourself, so to speak, instead of accepting the memorized patter of the out-of-work actors who generally supply the spiel on escorted group tours.

In the pages ahead, you supply the feet and the eyes, and I supply the commentary. I've picked three neighborhood walks that will envelop you in the sweep of the city's history, architecture . . . and gossip. The tour of Lower Manhattan, the oldest area of New York City, obviously has the most historical resonance, but the Harlem tour touches on Revolutionary War history, along with 20th-century issues; and the tour of Greenwich Village and SoHo quickly moves from the Colonial era, through the early days of the Republic, to the Civil War, to the industrial era, and all the way to the art scene of the 1970s.

I'm willing to bet that one of these itineraries will be the highlight of your visit. And if you happen to be a resident, a walking tour of one of these special areas of Manhattan is a fine exercise for natives, too.

Walking Tour 1: Lower Manhattan

Start: National Museum of the American Indian (One Bowling Green, between State and Whitehall sts.; take 4, 5 to Bowling Green)

Finish: The Woolworth Building

Time: Allow approximately 2 hours, not including time spent in restaurants or shops

Best times: Weekdays, during the daytime so that you can take in the hustle and bustle of the area

Worst times: At night, when you won't be able to discern many of the sights

If you have time for only one walking tour of New York, make it Lower Manhattan. Not only is this the most historic part of the city—in fact, the city reached no further than Wall Street for its first 100 years of existence—it also

affords the best overview of architectural styles in the city. Buildings range from jazzy Art Deco structures, to pseudo-Greek temples, to the soaring glass rectangles of the "International Style" heyday, one rubbing up against the other like guests at a fantastic costume party where Martha Washington cha-chas uninhibitedly with Donald Trump. All the sites inhabit a compact, eminently walkable area.

More importantly, Lower Manhattan is the area of the city that has seen the most tragedy, having endured not one but four terrorist attacks over the years (I describe them below), terrible fires, epidemics, and a cruel occupation by the British during the Revolutionary War that left the city in rubble. The scars of these events, the weight of the tears shed, and the lives lost give this area a resonance and presence unlike those found any other place in the United States.

1 Bowling Green Park

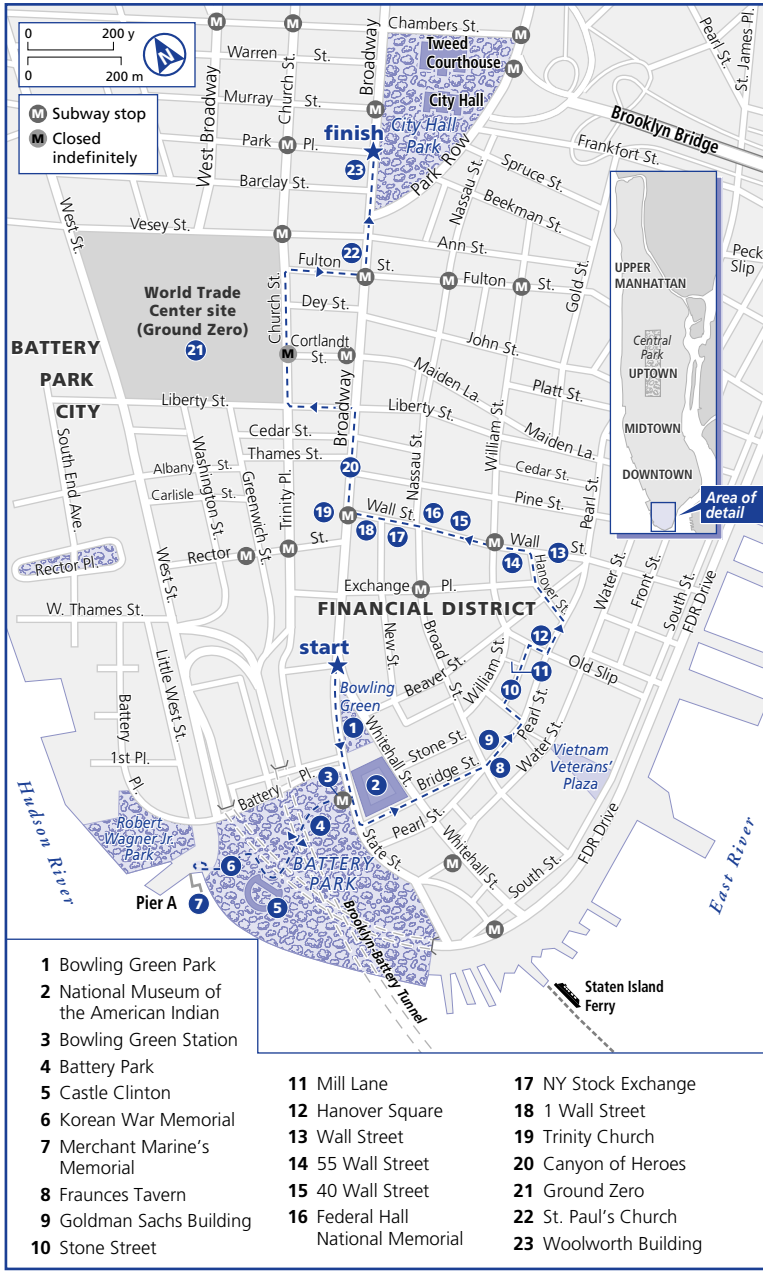
We begin our tour facing the city's first official park (est. 1733). Had you been a soldier during the British Colonial era, you would have been stationed at the fort that once stood here, Fort George, and likely you'd have passed your leisure time lawn bowling where the park now stands (hence the name Bowling Green Park).

On July 9, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was read aloud (near City Hall) and a small battalion of agitated colonists marched here to behead the statue of King George that stood in the center of the park. It had been erected just 5 years previously by many of these same men, in gratitude for the king's part in repealing the odious Stamp Act (the one that provoked the "no taxation without representation" movement). Though it can't be proven, legend has it that the lead statue was then melted down and used for cannon balls and bullets in the war against the British. The gate that rings the park is the original, one of the few Colonial structures of any sort left in Manhattan (when it was first erected, its spokes had royal crowns at their tips; these, too, were destroyed by the colonists).

Even earlier, the area that became the park was the site of New York's first great real estate deal: the "selling" of Manhattan by members of the Canarsie tribe (probably) to Peter Minuit of the Dutch East India Company, for 60 guilders (the equivalent of $24). It's a transaction that has been plagued by controversy for decades. Did the Indians know they were selling the island, or did they think that they were simply accepting shiny trinkets as part of a welcome ceremony? Were the Canarsie even in a position to sell it, as it had long been a communal hunting ground, used by a number of tribes? We'll never know the truth of the matter, but here is where it all likely happened; the event is marked by a small bas-relief sculpture on a flagpole in nearby Battery Park.

Look north to the great skyscrapers that now shadow the park. On your left, the building with the Egyptian motif (5 Broadway) was the headquarters of the White Star shipping line. It is here that distraught relatives came to learn the fate of their loved ones after the sinking of the *Titanic* (there's a famous photo of a stricken Jacob Astor exiting the building after learning that his son had perished). Across the street, to your right, is the former headquarters of Standard Oil, the company that made John D. Rockefeller his millions. As you step back out of the park you should be able to see the elaborate oil lamp at the top.

Walking Tour: Lower Manhattan



Retrace your steps out of the park and gaze up at the

2 National Museum of the American Indian

Designed by Cass Gilbert, the architect responsible for the Woolworth Building (which we'll visit later in this tour), this was one of the most important buildings in the city when it was built—the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Customs House. Before 1913, when the federal government instituted the personal income tax, the federal government's revenue came almost entirely from customs on goods imported into the States. And a full 75% of this revenue came from the Port of New York, where it was processed in this appropriately grand Beaux Arts colossus, completed in 1907, and comprising over 450,000 square feet of interior space.

It's a wedding cake of a structure, with dozens of bright white sculptures adorning the gray granite facade. Daniel Chester French was the sculptor—he also did the moving sculpture of Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial—and his choice of symbols could be used as a treatise on the prejudices of Victorian America. The four women seated at the front represent the four "great" continents of the world. From left to right as you look at them, they are Asia, the Americas (South America, barely present, is tellingly represented by the Aztec-like structure that North America has her foot on), Europe, and Africa. America and Europe look full of vigor and purpose, but Asia has her eyes closed (perhaps in meditation?), and Africa—in a metaphor for her lack of vision and power?—is in a deep slumber. America is sheltering a new immigrant who crouches to her left, and the immigrant is pushing forward a wheel with wings on it, those of the Roman god Mercury, the divine overseer of commerce (a comment, some think, on the essential role immigrants were playing in the expanding economy).

At the top of the building are 12 more figures, this time meant to represent the great trading nations of history: Greece, Rome, Phoenicia, Genoa, Venice, Spain, Holland, Portugal, Denmark, England, France, and Belgium. Why Belgium, you ask? The official story is that during World War I, "vandals" carved BELGIUM across the shield of the figure that had originally been "Germany." No explanation has ever been given on how vandals could surreptitiously make such a big change to one of the most visible and heavily guarded buildings in the city.

If you have the time, go inside the building for a peek at the marvelous WPA murals in the rotunda (depicting the great conquistadors, ironic as the building now houses the National Museum of the American Indian); the staircase on the right as you enter (meant to evoke the look of the inside of a nautilus shell); and in what is now the study center of the museum, the elaborate, imposing rows of teller windows where merchants would pay their Customs taxes.

You should be facing the museum, so take a right and cross the street to the larger park there, stopping at the little house that serves as an entry to the subway.

3 Bowling Green Station

This 1904 structure is one of only two surviving subway "control houses" in New York City. When the subway was first opened in 1904, all stations had these little houses; now riders simply descend a staircase directly from the sidewalk.

Enter Battery Park and walk to the large, partially crushed *The Sphere*.

4 Battery Park

Named for the battery of guns the British kept here (trained on the river), this park is landfill, created immediately after the American Revolution. It has a long history as a military training ground, but in front of you is a non-military sight and one of the most moving in Lower Manhattan: *The Sphere,* designed by Fritz Koenig, a sculpture that once stood in the plaza area of the World Trade Center. When the towers came crashing down upon it, at a speed of more than 60 mph, *The Sphere* tore apart and many pieces were irreparably bent. It was reassembled and now rests here as a monument to the cause of world peace (which was also the original theme of the sculpture).

Make your way towards the water and you should come upon a round stone building, the spot where tickets are now sold for the ferry to Liberty and Ellis Island.

5 Castle Clinton

Though it doesn't look like much now, this circular structure (it was taller in some earlier incarnations) has, over the years, been at the center of New York life. In 1807, the "West Battery," as it was then called, was built as a fort on a landfill island in the water off Manhattan to ward off British invasions; it never saw action—the Brits attacked Washington, D.C., instead during the War of 1812. In 1823, the federal government ceded the site (renamed Castle Clinton in 1817, in honor of the city's mayor, De Witt Clinton) to the city and it became an extremely popular entertainment center called Castle Gardens (the "Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind, was a headliner here in 1850) until 1855 when the space was transformed once more into the city's first immigrant processing center. Over eight million new arrivals, a full two-thirds of those who came to the United States at this time, spent their first hours in the United States here registering their names with the government, exchanging money, and getting information on jobs, medical care, and lodgings. In 1890, the vast number of immigrants—and the growing problem of outsiders scamming them—necessitated a move to a larger and more easily patrolled space, Ellis Island. The famed architectural team of McKim, Mead and White then stepped in and transformed the site into the nation's first aquarium, visited by about 90 million people until it was moved in 1941 to Coney Island. After the site stood empty for many years, the National Parks Service took it over and restored the Castle Clinton of the original fort.

Turn right to face the

6 Korean War Memorial

Because so many nationalities fought in the Korean War, the government decided to erect a memorial celebrating the "Universal Soldier." The Welsh-born artist Mac Adams, who created the piece, does this neatly by showing only the outline of the soldier within the imposing obelisk of black granite; you, the viewer, fill in what the soldier looks like. Around the base of the monument are inscribed the nations that participated in this war.

Walk towards the water until you come to the

7 Merchant Marine Memorial

Based on a famed photograph, taken by a German serviceman, of sailors on a sinking lifeboat after the attack on the

S.S. *Muskogee* (off the east coast of the U.S.), this dramatic sculpture group commemorates the nearly 7,000 Merchant Marines who perished during World War II. It was created by Marisol Escobar, and it's interesting to visit at different times of the day: at low tide, you'll see the bottom figure from his knees up, by high tide he's drowning up to his neck in water.

If you have the time, walk further around the park to see the other war memorials scattered here and there.

Retrace your steps and leave the park, walking around to the back of the American Indian museum on Bridge Street. Cross Whitehall Street and continue walking on Bridge away from the river until your reach

8 Fraunces Tavern (54 Pearl St., at the corner of Broad St.)

The bad news first: This is not what Fraunces Tavern actually looked like, but a hopeful reconstruction completed in 1904 and based on the architectural styles of the period (about 40% of the building is original). Nonetheless, it was here that the Sons of Liberty met on dozens of occasions to discuss plans for evicting the British. Once the Revolutionary War was over, Fraunces Tavern was the place where George Washington delivered his famous "Farewell to the Troops" and where Alexander Hamilton set up his first Office of the Treasury. Inside is a rather mediocre restaurant and an interesting museum (you can read more about it on p. 164).

On a more sobering note, in 1975 Fraunces Tavern was bombed by the Armed Forces Puerto Rican National Liberation. Four people were killed and dozens injured. The choice of this site for the bombing had dual reasons: Not only is it a symbol of American ideals, it is one of the few important historic buildings in New York that has a Caribbean connection, as Samuel Fraunces was an immigrant from the West Indies.

Look behind you and you'll see

9 Goldman Sachs Building

Directly across the street from the tavern is the headquarters of Goldman Sachs, the massive glass and brownstone skyscraper that cuts Stone Street in two. When it was being constructed, crews found the foundations of old **Governor Lovelace's Tavern,** another Colonial-era watering hole, and briefly seat of the Colonial government. In a compromise with local archaeologists, part of the site was left open with a glass-viewing pane atop it. If you walk around the perimeter of the skyscraper in the same direction that you've been going, you should be able to see these excavations through glass panels in the sidewalk (they're at the end of the rows of benches, one under the colonnade, one in the open air). Take a moment to read the plaques and gaze down.

Continue to walk north and then curve around the Goldman Sachs Building until you spot

10 Stone Street

Here you'll have a remarkably accurate snapshot of what the city looked like in about 1837. This narrow winding street (it's the next street west from Pearl St.) was the first to be paved in New Amsterdam and the only street that is thought to still be where the Dutch colonists originally placed it. All of the buildings were constructed in the period immediately following the great fire of 1835, which devastated the city, wiping out 20 square city blocks. Many blamed the volunteer firefighters of the time who, working in rival squads for

cash payment, spent more time fighting one another than fighting the flames (Martin Scorsese's 2002 film, *Gangs of New York,* dramatically re-creates a similar firefighter battle).

The buildings we see today are classic Greek Revival structures of straight up-and-down brick with granite bases. They were built as counting houses and warehouses for local merchants. **57 Stone St.,** you'll notice, has a very Dutch steplike gable, added in 1908 by architect C. P. H. Gilbert as a nostalgic nod to New Amsterdam.

Continue to the middle of the street and then step to the left onto

⓫ Mill Lane

Mill Lane has the distinction of being the shortest street in Manhattan (and, yes, there was once a mill on this block). It was here, records show, that Peter Stuyvesant reluctantly surrendered the city to British troops in 1664, once he found that none of the pragmatic Dutch merchant-citizens of New Amsterdam wanted to stand and fight against the invaders (capitalism trumped patriotism—a battle would have hurt business, after all).

Take a break

Grab a sweet treat at the patisserie, **Financier ✯ (62 Stone St.; 8am–8:30pm; $).** There are both indoor and outdoor tables, and every French delicacy you could want—from fruit tarts to Napoleons just oozing cream. Espresso, cappuccino, and soft drinks are also available.

At the end of Stone Street lies

⓬ Hanover Square

One of the only places in New York City to retain its "royalist" name after the American Revolution, it was named for the House of Hanover, from which the era's British monarchy was descended. Once the center of the social and political life of the city, this was where the colony's first newspaper was published, and the cotton exchange dominated one corner. When he was still considered a respectable citizen, notorious pirate Captain Kidd lived here in bourgeois splendor with his wife (they were known for their grand dinner parties). India House, on the west side of the square, is a perfectly preserved example of a brownstone banking house from the 1850s; it's now an expensive restaurant.

Continue walking to the uptown point of the triangle that is Hanover Square and hook a left onto Hanover Street. Walk until you come to

⓭ Wall Street

You are now standing at what was the boundary of the city during Dutch Colonial times. If you had been alive then, you'd be staring at a 9-foot-high wooden wall erected to keep out local Native Americans as well as British invaders, who were by then vying with the Dutch and French for land in the Americas. To your right, when you face north, would have been the largest slave market in the United States (approximately at the corner of Pearl and White sts.), a bastion of inhumanity that held more auctions than any other in the U.S. in the 18th century. Slavery was not fully outlawed in New York until 1827, making it one of the last two northern states to do so.

Take a left and walk to

⓮ 55 Wall St.

This building is one of the area's most impressive renovation jobs. Originally built to house the Merchant Exchange and finished in 1842, it was a grand example of Greek Revival architecture,

most notable for the 12 massive columns that graced the front, each carved from a single block of stone. In 1907, the noted architectural firm of McKim, Meade and White was hired to enlarge the space; instead of tearing it down and starting anew, as so many lesser architects would have done, they brilliantly built up, adding another level of columns to the second story (this time in the more ornamental Corinthian style) to harmonize with the first. The building is now a hotel, one of the poshest in the city.

Stroll a few steps west to

15 40 Wall St.

New York's greatest monument to thwarted ambitions. Architect William Van Alen had a dream: He wanted to build the tallest building in the world, taller than the Woolworth Building (which held the record from 1917 to 1930). Problem was, his former partner and archrival H. Craig Severance had the same aspirations, and in the summer of 1929, at the height of the bubble that preceded Black Tuesday (the great stock market crash), they began a "race to the top," Van Alen at 40 Wall St., and Severance at the Chrysler Building. In a record 11 months, Van Alen completed 40 Wall St., then the Bank of Manhattan building, certain that the Chrysler building was completed and his structure would be the tallest. But once Van Alen finished construction, Severance administered the coup de grace that he'd been hiding in the elevator shaft of his building: the Chrysler Building's iconic, Art Deco spire, which added an unbeatable 125 feet onto the building. I can only imagine that Van Alen felt some small measure of satisfaction when the Chrysler's title was snatched from it one short year later by the Empire State Building. Take a moment to gaze up at 40 Wall; it's still an impressive achievement and a beautiful building, with all of the ziggurat-like stepbacks (cascading layers) of the prototypical late '20s skyscraper.

Keep walking in the same direction until you get to the corner of Wall Street and Broad Street. Our next stop is

16 Federal Hall National Memorial

The most historically significant piece of land in the city. What you will see is a quintessential Greek Revival edifice, a modified version of the Parthenon, actually (can't get much more Greek than that!) that was completed in 1842. Note the statue of George Washington; it was here, perhaps on the very spot where the statue now stands, that George Washington took the oath of office to become president (though not in this actual building, but in an earlier one located on this spot). That monumental occasion would be enough to secure its place in history, but matters just begin there: The Bill of Rights was drawn up in this former British City Hall (transformed into "Federal Hall" when the Brits quit the city); the famous Zenger Trial (which helped secure freedom of the press) took place in a court in the hall; and before the Revolutionary War, the Stamp Act Congress met here and railed against "taxation without representation." As I write this chapter, the building is closed for renovations—falling debris from the World Trade Center attack caused a large crack in the roof—but if it's open when you arrive, do take a moment to step inside. You'll quickly see that despite its very square outward appearance there's a magnificent rotunda within, one of the loveliest public spaces in the city.

Note the austere, somewhat anonymous-looking building across the street from the hall; it was the headquarters of

banker J. P. Morgan (the window of his former office is above the flagpole). If you look closely at the side of the building that faces Federal Hall, you'll notice that it is pocked with small indentations. These are the scars of the Financial District's first terrorist attack, which occurred in 1920. One bright and sunny morning (isn't it odd that these events always seem to occur on beautiful days?), a horse and carriage loaded with explosives parked here. Moments later a huge explosion shook the street, killing 31 people and wounding scores more. The blast was so powerful that all that was ever found of the horse was its horseshoe, and the police used this piece of evidence to trace the blacksmith who made it. He had vague recollections of shoeing the horse of an Italian man, and on this scanty piece of evidence the police (and press) decided that the blast must have been the work of Italian anarchists. No one was ever charged with the crime.

Walk around the corner until you're facing the

17 New York Stock Exchange

You are now gazing at the most famous (some would say infamous) financial institution in the world, the New York Stock Exchange. The building's towering columns, crowded ornamental pediment, and huge flag trumpet louder than any opening bell that this is a place of incomparable might and prestige (interestingly, it's a much more imposing building than the government's plainer Federal Hall across the street). In front of the Stock Exchange is a scraggly buttonwood tree, meant to invoke the buttonwood that New York's first traders stood under in 1792 when they met to begin brokering the Revolutionary War debt—the first stock market in America.

One odd fact about the Stock Exchange: Though it's associated in the popular imagination with Wall Street, its facade actually fronts Broad Street, not Wall.

Continue crosstown on Wall Street towards Broadway until you arrive at

18 1 Wall St.

Take a moment to gaze at 1 Wall St., an absolutely stunning Art Deco building, once one of the priciest addresses in the city. The beautifully fluted, curtainlike limestone of the facade; the spider web pattern of the cathedral window above the entry; and the sumptuous, soaring lobby remind us of a time when such excess and exquisite workmanship were the norm for places of business (which were, literally, in the heady times before the Stock Exchange crash, conceived as temples of commerce).

Cross the street to

19 Trinity Church

This is actually the third Trinity Church to stand on this site. The first version was destroyed in the fire set by fleeing colonists in 1776 to thwart British occupiers (it ended up razing one-third of the structures in Manhattan). The second was poorly constructed, and its roof collapsed in a heavy snowstorm. But the third was a keeper and is considered by many to be one of the best, if not *the* best, Gothic Revival buildings in the United States.

Designed by Richard Upjohn, the religious structure can be seen as the stone and mortar embodiment of a theological movement that was sweeping the Anglican Church at that time, one that attempted to invigorate the Church by harkening back to its Catholic roots. Specifically, it paid heed to the idea that the Church needed a strong hierarchy to survive. So instead of creating a boxy,

continuous space, like so many churches of the period (and like St. Paul's further down Broadway), Upjohn used self-consciously medieval features designed to underscore the sacred nature of the clergy's space, including a chancel. Normally, in a Gothic cathedral, the chancel (which is the area behind the altar, reserved for the clergy and choir) is marked off by railings, but that idea was quite controversial in Democratic New York, so Upjohn created a subtle solution, raising this area a few feet above the ground, to give the feeling of an exalted place, without prominent barriers in place. Other Gothic features include the towering 280-foot spire, which was the tallest structure in the city until the piers of the Brooklyn Bridge were built; the flying buttresses; and the lovely stained glass windows. The doors were modeled after Ghiberti's famous bronze doors for the Baptistery of Florence and were designed by noted American architect Richard Morris Hunt, though the sculptures on them were done by Austrian immigrant Karl Bitter. You can see the latter's self-portrait in the knoblike head sticking out of the lower right hand corner of the door; above him is Richard Upjohn and above that Richard Morris Hunt (who also designed the base of the Statue of Liberty).

Don't miss touring the graveyard, which holds the remains of many Revolutionary War–era New Yorkers, including countless babies and toddlers felled by the various epidemics that swept the city each summer during that period. Among the notables are Captain James Ludlow, who uttered the famous command, "Don't give up the ship," in the War of 1812; he's buried in the tomb that looks like a ship, on the southern side of the church, surrounded by a fence made from captured British cannons. Behind Lawrence and to the right a bit is the most famous tomb here, that of Alexander Hamilton; beside Hamilton is the grave of steamboat designer Robert Fulton.

Exit the churchyard and continue north toward Liberty Street and the

20 Canyon of Heroes

Look down as you amble along. You've entered what used to be known as the "Canyon of Heroes," and the brass plates with names and dates list the ticker tape parades that have been held along this swatch of Broadway. Had you been here on one of those occasions in the 1930s or '40s, the crowds around you would have been shoulder to shoulder, and above your head, hundreds of men would have been standing at the windows, showering the street with the long paper ribbons of stock market quotations that spewed from their machines, marking the dance of the stock market. Read the plates. The catalogue of names is an interesting retread of American history and political alliances; along with athletes, astronauts, and presidents, you'll find parades for the American hostages released from Iran (1982), pianist Van Cliburn (1958), and the controversial President Sukarno of Indonesia (1956).

Take a left on Liberty Street and walk to

21 "Ground Zero"

Take a moment to read the **"Wall of Heroes"** postings along the fence. To read more about this site, go to p. 136.

Facing north, take a right on Fulton Street and walk to

22 St. Paul's Church

Built in 1766, this is not only the oldest church in the city, but the only public space to be in continuous use since the Colonial era. The design of the church, with its Ionic columns and huge pediment, was based on that of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London,

though I think the overall effect of this church is not nearly as graceful. Still, the church is redolent with history: George Washington had a pew here (now marked by a plaque), and he came directly here after his inauguration to pray and give thanks.

The church miraculously survived a rain of fiery metal when the Twin Towers collapsed, and served as a focal point for the volunteer effort that ensued as hundreds of people came from all over the world to search for survivors and then human remains. Many slept at St. Pauls, on the pews or in cots, and took their meals here; an exhibition detailing the saga of these volunteers is housed at the rear of the church.

Continue walking up Broadway until you reach the

㉓ Woolworth Building (233 Broadway, between Barclay St. and Park Place, opposite City Hall Park)

From tragedy to triumph. We end our tour in front of what is arguably the most dramatic skyscraper ever built, a lacy late-Gothic tower that goes straight up, with none of the stepbacks of the sleek Art Deco skyscrapers that were to follow it. Instead, architect Cass Gilbert took his inspiration from Rouen Cathedral in France, building directly to the sky and covering the facade with snarling gargoyles, sharply angled flying buttresses, and spires, all faced in creamy terra cotta. As F.W. Woolworth intended, it was the tallest building in the world from the year it was built (1913) all the way until 1930. Woolworth, an inveterate collector of nickels and dimes, paid for the building in cash.

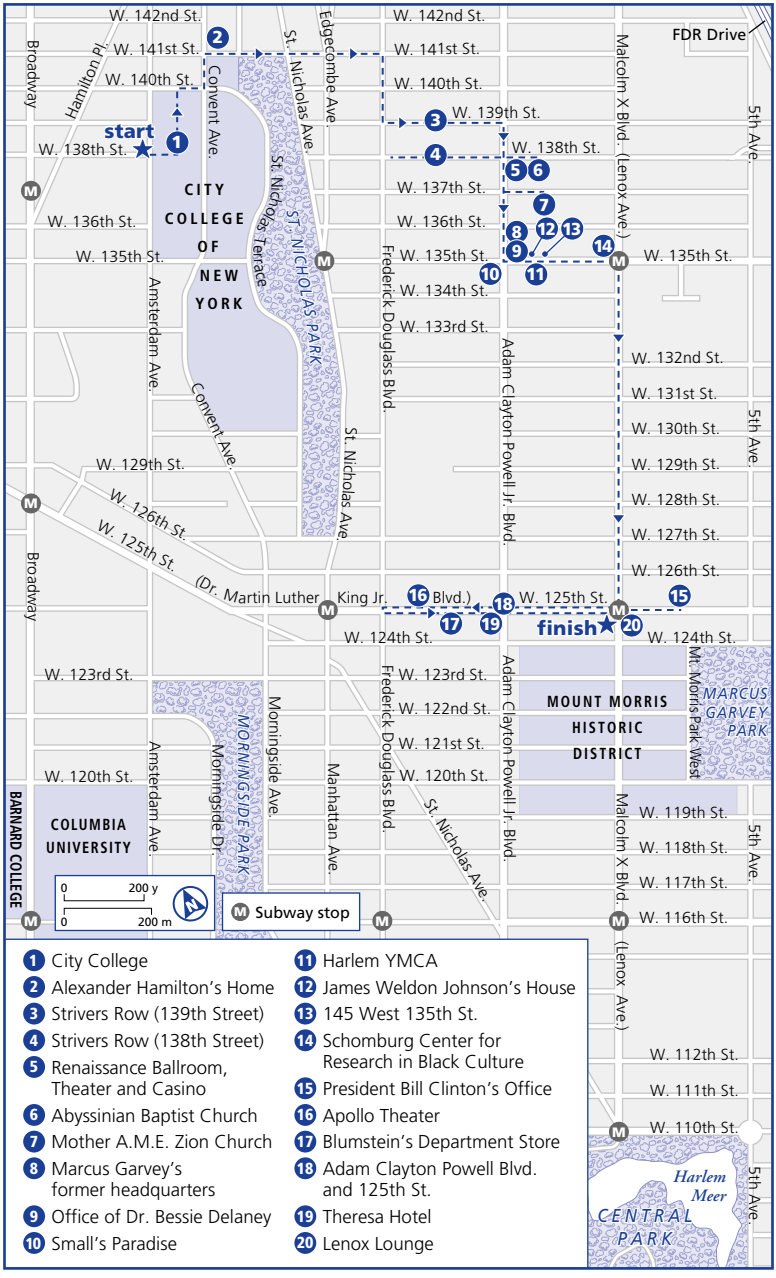
The interior is as grand as the exterior, with a vaulted mosaic ceiling, glowing gold-leafed cornices, and humorous gargoyles of Woolworth counting his coins and Cass Gilbert embracing a model of the building. Unfortunately, the lobby has been closed to the public since 9/11, but catching a glimpse of this beautiful interior space is worth getting yelled at. I've been able to manage a good minute and a half of gazing before security guards have shooed me out.

Walking Tour 2: Harlem

Start: 138th Street and Amsterdam Avenue (❶ Train to 135th St.)
Finish: The Lenox Lounge
Time: Allow approximately 3½ hours, not including time spent in restaurants or shops (or divide the tour in half—see below—for a shorter walk)
Best times: Tuesday through Sunday in the daytime
Worst times: At night, as you won't be able to see the architecture clearly

More than in any other place in the city, you need to have a strong imagination and social sense to really enjoy touring Harlem. The tragic fact is that much of what made this area unique, lively and . . . well, Harlem, during the fabled Jazz Era (aka The Harlem Renaissance), crumbled beneath the wrecking ball decades ago. What you do see here—the wide avenues, the rows of brownstones, the

Walking Tour: Harlem



1. City College
2. Alexander Hamilton's Home
3. Strivers Row (139th Street)
4. Strivers Row (138th Street)
5. Renaissance Ballroom, Theater and Casino
6. Abyssinian Baptist Church
7. Mother A.M.E. Zion Church
8. Marcus Garvey's former headquarters
9. Office of Dr. Bessie Delaney
10. Small's Paradise
11. Harlem YMCA
12. James Weldon Johnson's House
13. 145 West 135th St.
14. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
15. President Bill Clinton's Office
16. Apollo Theater
17. Blumstein's Department Store
18. Adam Clayton Powell Blvd. and 125th St.
19. Theresa Hotel
20. Lenox Lounge

elegant apartment buildings—are somewhat an accident of history, the physical face of an area that housed a people, but wasn't necessarily "of" that people (I'll explain below). But despite all this, Harlem remains the African-American capital of the United States (sometimes called the "capital for Africans throughout the world"), a one-of-a-kind area with much to recommend it. Architect and author Zevilla Jackson Preston best sums up the appeal of the area in the book *Harlem World,* in which she writes, "Ultimately it is the energy on the street, the beat on the street—all of the beautiful black people on the streets—that make the experience unique."

> *"Harlem is the Negro metropolis and as such is everywhere known. In the history of New York, the name Harlem has changed from Dutch to Irish to Jewish to Negro: but it is through this last change that it has gained widespread fame."*
>
> —James Weldon Johnson, 1917

Harlem was settled by a number of different groups over the years—Dutch farmers first, followed by their British counterparts, then poor Irish and Italian immigrants. But development of the area only took off in the years just prior to 1904, when the city's first subway line opened, a 9½-mile snaking tunnel, connecting Lower Manhattan with points as far north as 145th Street. In anticipation of this event, an unprecedented housing boom hit the neighborhood, with developers slapping up Victorian row house after row house for the crowds of upwardly mobile immigrants—middle-class Jews and Germans, primarily—they were certain would soon flood this newly commutable neighborhood. What they didn't anticipate were recessions and panics in 1893, 1907, and 1910, which deflated the housing market; and the development of large numbers of homes on the Upper West Side.

Because of these miscalculations, property owners were left with hundreds of unrentable homes and soon began doing what nobody else had done in the history of the United States: renting or selling brand-new, often beautifully appointed buildings to the race that had, until that point, always made do with the tumble-down, ghetto housing no other group would accept. In 1905, a pioneering real estate agent named Philip Payton persuaded a white landlord to rent him 31 W. 133rd St. so that he could re-lease it to African Americans. The landlord accepted the offer because Payton promised to pay far more than the going rate, a substantial $5 more per tenant per month (a lot of money in those days). Several other white landlords panicked and bought the buildings in order to evict the black tenants, but by then it was too late. Payton had the funding to buy several other buildings, and black migration into the area began in earnest.

So what you'll see in Harlem are homes and businesses that were not created by or for African Americans. These lovely buildings, however, did allow for a standard of living and security, primarily in the '20s, '30s, and '40s, that was unprecedented for African Americans living in the United States.

Another thing you won't see in Harlem today are the Jazz Era nightclubs and theaters for which the area was famed. Tragically, those historic sites were torn down. But we will visit places where the great political figures of Harlem, men such as Alexander Hamilton, Malcolm X, Eubie Blake, and Marcus Garvey lived, worked, and made history.

And now is an excellent time to visit, as the homogeneity of the neighborhood has been changing of late, with more and more "downtowners" of all races moving into Harlem, drawn by the beauty of its historic buildings, plummeting crime rates and, most importantly, the relatively lower cost of living up here. According to Douglas Elliman Real Estate, a 4,500-square-foot town house in Harlem sells for $1.5 million today; a townhouse of a similar size in Greenwich Village would go for at least $7 million. Visit now before the neighborhood loses more of its character (and current residents).

A note about this tour: Harlem is the largest neighborhood in Manhattan by far, stretching from approximately 116th Street all the way up to the river. The walking tour I've devised, therefore, is a lengthy one divided by a subway ride in the middle. If you're ambitious, you can do the whole thing in an afternoon; or simply limit yourself to one half, starting either at the beginning and ending before the subway ride (stop 13); or going directly to 125th Street to begin your tour at stop 14.

1 City College (138th St. and Amsterdam Ave.)

We'll start at Harlem's own City College, established in 1847 (the oldest college in today's City University of New York, known to locals as CUNY) as the "Free Academy," with a mandate to educate the children of immigrant and working-class New Yorkers. In 1897 it moved to this site, changed its name to the present one, and built itself a Gothic quadrangle à la Harvard or Yale, a symbolic way of saying that this institution of higher learning for New York's "underclass" was just as good, if not better, than those more prestigious universities (and it proved that point in years to come). But though the Gothic buildings of City College have all of the requisite spires, lacy stonework, and arch gargoyles, they don't look like any Gothic structure you've ever seen before, do they? Looming and dark, like buildings from the kingdom of Mordor in *Lord of the Rings,* these halls were created from mottled black schist (Manhattan bedrock), a dense, 5-million-year-old rock hard enough to bear the weight of all the heavy skyscrapers that were soon to emerge downtown. At the time of the college's construction these blocks were abundant and cheap, having been recently excavated from the nearby Broadway subway line. You won't see this type of schist used in this quantity on any other major structure in New York. The original buildings were designed by George Post, the architect of the New York Stock Exchange (see p. 225 for more on this building).

Since its inception, City College has been a remarkable center of learning, its policy of giving free tuition to gifted scholars (in place until 1977) helping to draw the brightest students in New York. Scientist Jonas Salk, who invented the polio vaccine, studied here, as did Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter; lyricists Ira Gershwin and Yip Harburg; Colin Powell; former Mayor Ed Koch; Pulitzer-Prize winning novelist Oscar Hijuelos; muckraking journalist Upton Sinclair; and many others. In all, City College has nine Nobel Prize winners among its alumni, more than any other public university in the nation.

Wander down the hill (you'll be on the top as you enter through the college gate), and take a closer look at the gargoyles in the archways of the buildings—

A Short Detour Around Sugar Hill

If you have time, instead of descending the hill leading away from Hamilton Grange immediately, you may want to stroll around "Sugar Hill," the surrounding area, so named because this is where African Americans with money, or "sugar," resided in the 1930s and '40s, living the "sweet life." Duke Ellington had a home here, as did Ethel Waters, Lena Horne, Thurgood Marshall, and Ralph Ellison.

these are caricatures of students and professors engaged in the subjects each hall was meant to house. Take a left when you reach the street at the bottom of the hill and walk towards the Convent Avenue gate.

Follow the signs to Hamilton Grange. If you miss the signs, simply walk out the gate and downhill on Convent Avenue until you see the large statue of Alexander Hamilton.

2 Hamilton Grange

I'm at a bit of a loss to direct you at this point, because the **home of Alexander Hamilton** (Wed–Sun, 9am–5pm; free admission), hero of the American Revolution and first Secretary of the Treasury, is scheduled to be moved from its current location sometime in 2007. So when you read this, you'll either be able to visit it at 285 Convent Ave., where the home was carelessly wedged sideways with its grand porch chopped off, in 1889 (the front of the house faces the side wall of a local church); or in St. Nicholas Park, directly to your right and down the hill a bit as you exit City College.

Wherever it happens to be when you come, you'll be visiting the home Hamilton retreated to, in disgrace, after his adulterous affair with a woman named Maria Reynolds was exposed in a Republican newspaper. Seeking to ease the strain on his marriage and appease his wife, Elizabeth (who grew up on a grand country estate), he transferred his family to this midsize farm, named Hamilton Grange for his ancestral manor in Scotland, 8 miles from the center of the city. Most days he traveled 2 hours by coach to his work in "the city," making him one of New York's first commuters. But distance didn't keep him out of trouble. On July 11, 1804, after living at the Grange only 2 years, he was mortally wounded in his famous duel with Vice President Aaron Burr. He died the next day.

The building is the oldest in New York, an elegantly simple, wooden Federalist-style farmhouse. Step inside to catch the video on Hamilton's life, and see a bit of the house. The first floor is where the reception rooms would have been, but these were moved to the second floor (which housed the bedrooms in Hamilton's day). The Louis XVI–style chairs are original; most of the other furnishings are simply period pieces.

Walk down 141st Street to Frederick Douglass Boulevard, past Hamilton Terrace, St. Nicholas Avenue, and Edgecombe Street (this will be your longest walk of the tour). Turn right at Frederick Douglass Boulevard make a left at 139th Street.

3 Striver's Row

You have now reached "Striver's Row," one of the most famous neighborhoods in Harlem, actually comprised of four

rows of houses on 138th and 139th streets. The neighborhood was the brainchild of developer David H. King (he'd earlier overseen the construction of the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty), who had the dream of creating a dignified neighborhood for people of modest means. So he purchased 9 acres of land from the Equitable Insurance Company, and bought all of the building materials at once and in bulk, thus obtaining reasonable prices for the very finest of woods, brick, stone, and other materials. In a creative move, he hired not one but three architectural firms for the project. Each chose a different architectural style, but kept the scale of the buildings the same, creating one of the most harmonious and interesting-looking cityscapes in Manhattan.

As you walk east on 139th Street, look right to take in the eight row houses designed by architects Bruce White and Clarence Luce, built between 1891 and 1893 (buildings #202–252). There was a fascination in the 1890s with all things Colonial, and that's reflected here in the traditional stoops and measured proportions of these brick buildings. On the other side of the street are 32 even lovelier homes, done in buttery sandstone. Famed architect Stanford White designed these himself in neo-Italian Renaissance style (horizontal lintels over the windows, circular ornamentation across the facade).

You'll note that the block is punctuated every so often by gates that lead to a small back alley. King felt that residents would be willing to give up a traditional backyard for a back alley where trash could be collected and deliveries made. As a result, this is one of the very few streets in the city that is never disfigured in the early morning by big garbage cans and plastic sacks of trash. On 138th Street (our next stop), many of these gates still read: PRIVATE ROAD: PLEASE WALK YOUR HORSES.

So all of this innovation and quality should have been a sweeping success for King, right? Wrong. He sold only nine houses, and in 1895 a national depression forced him to sell the remaining ones back to Equitable, his mortgagee. Most of the homes remained empty until 1919, when Equitable, after many years of refusing to do so, finally began selling the homes to African-American buyers.

As you stroll along, look out for the homes of the "Father of the Blues," composer **W.C. Handy** (232 W. 39th St.); orchestra leader **Fletcher Henderson** (228 W. 139th St.); and famed boxer **Harry Wills** (245 W. 139th St.). Though Wills was the best boxer of his day, he was never allowed to vie for the heavyweight title because of racism—champion Jack Dempsey, not wanting to fight a black man, paid Wills a forfeit of $50,000 rather than enter the ring with him.

Turn right on Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and make a right onto

4 138th Street

Architects Edwin R. Will and J. Averit Webster are responsible for the look on the second block of Striver's Row—the north side of the street filled with Queen Anne–style domiciles, the south all neo-Renaissance. Among the notables housed on the block were songwriter **Eubie Blake** (236 W. 138th St.) and the **Black Swan Recording Company** (257 W. 138th St.). Black Swan was the first company to make records by African American artists, scoring big hits with Ethel Waters and Fletcher Henderson. Ironically, it was the success of these records that ultimately led to the company's demise—mainstream companies,

sniffing cash, started publishing recordings by African-American singers and musicians.

Though I've constantly mentioned the famous people who lived here, this really was home, for most of its existence, to lower-middle-class African Americans: teachers, janitors, bank clerks, and waiters. Many lived in the boarding houses that these homes soon became, but all were thought to be "striving" to better themselves—hence the name "Strivers Row."

Walk back towards Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and cross the street. On the corner of 138th, look up to see what remains of the famed

5 Renaissance Ballroom, Theater, and Casino

From the 1920s through the 1950s, this now-decrepit, boarded-up building on the corner was a center of Harlem nightlife, a club where residents could not only work (as they did at the "whites only" Cotton Club) but also party, as the casino was open to all. Music was provided by, among others, famed bandleaders Chick Webb and Fletcher Henderson. Built by Afro-Caribbean owners, another rarity at that time, its gimmick was an in-house basketball squad that played with portable baskets in the ballroom. Called the Rennys, it was the first African-American basketball team anywhere, precursors to the Harlem Globetrotters and one of the winningest teams ever (it won 80% of the nearly 3,200 games it played before disbanding).

Walk east towards the yellow sign that says BUMP AHEAD until you come to the

6 Abyssinian Baptist Church (136–142 W. 138th St.)

Abyssinian Baptist was founded in protest. In 1808, a group of free Negroes left the First Baptist Church of New York, angered by its segregated seating policy. With the help of Ethiopian merchants, they formed their own church downtown, which pastor Clayton Powell, Sr. eventually moved to Harlem. Powell's son, Clayton Powell, Jr., took his place in 1937, and the church remained at the forefront of the then nascent Civil Rights movement thanks in large part to Powell, Jr.'s legendary oratorical skills and community activism. In 1944, Powell, Jr. became the first African American to represent Harlem (or any other district in New York State, for that matter) in the U.S. Congress and served there until 1970, eventually becoming chair of the Education and Labor committees. His career was cut short by a corruption scandal, and though he was ultimately cleared by the Supreme Court, he lost his seat to Charles Rangel, who still holds it today. Later pastors of the Abyssinian—Samuel DeWitt Proctor (a mentor to Martin Luther King) and Calvin O. Butts, Jr.—also were heavily engaged in the civil rights movement and local politics. Today, this is the largest black congregation in the United States.

The unimaginative neo-Gothic building that houses the church was created by architect Charles W. Bolton, and completed in 1920 (and it's a sign of those times that this all-black church put up stained glass featuring blond-haired, blue-eyed angels).

Before you walk on, look across the street to 133 W. 138th St., where blues singer Alberta Hunter (1895–1984) lived. She was an extremely successful entertainer from the 1920s through the 1940s; in fact she was the first black singer to be backed by a white band. She recorded and performed music with Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong,

Bessie Smith, and Fletcher Henderson, and toured with the U.S.O. during World War II. In 1959, she quit music to study nursing, working in that profession for the next 20 years, until a comeback in 1982 led to a brief but stellar cabaret career before her death at the age of 84.

Take a Break

Cookbook author Norma Jean Darden's homey cafe, **Miss Maude's Spoonbread, Too (547 Lenox Ave., near 137th St.; $$–$$$),** is a great place to tuck into anything fried, smothered, or Southern. If you don't feel like a plate of barbecued ribs or pork chops, order up a slice of the unbeatable red velvet cake with a large mug of milk for a sugary pick-me-up.

Retrace your steps to Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and take a left on the corner, going south to 137th Street. Take another left and walk to

7 Mother A.M.E. Zion Church (140–148 W. 137th St.)

Founded in 1796, Mother Zion Church is the oldest black church in New York State and was one of the stops along the Underground Railroad (legend has it that it sheltered runaway slave Frederick Douglass). In 1850, when the church was located in Lower Manhattan, 1,500 people gathered there to protest the capture of an escaped slave named James Hamlet. The crowd managed to raise $800 to free Hamlet and keep him from being sent back to Maryland. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Paul Robeson were all members of the congregation. This is the fifth home for "Mother Zion," and one of the few major churches in Harlem to have been designed by an African-American architect, George W. Foster, Jr.

Walk back to Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and turn left, then head south to

8 2305 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd. (between 136th and 135th sts.)

Though his legend has dimmed in recent years, in the 1920s and '30s Marcus Garvey was one of the most controversial, colorful, and important figures in Harlem and across the Americas, the founder of the first black nationalist movement the U.S. had ever seen. Called the Universal Negro Improvement Association, it was located on the second floor of this building. UNIA advocated economic self-sufficiency for African Americans and, ultimately, a return to Africa, which Garvey hoped would one day be one vast empire, controlled by Negroes (rather than colonial whites).

Though Garvey was unsuccessful in his goal of shipping large numbers of African Americans back to Africa, his Negro Factories Corporation at one point employed hundreds of workers across Harlem; and branches of the UNIA in other parts of the United States and the Caribbean were also successful in creating black-owned businesses of many types. Garvey was arrested on trumped-up charges of mail fraud in 1923 and deported in 1927. He died penniless in London several years later, but his ideas inspired a generation of American and African leaders.

Walk a few steps south to

9 2303 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.

At the age of 102, Dr. Bessie Delaney and her sister Sadie became national celebrities, thanks to their best-selling autobiography, "Having Our Say." The daughters of a former slave, the two

women were both college graduates, with Bessie spending the majority of her life practicing dentistry in this very building. Always socially aware, Bessie was known in the neighborhood for her reasonable rates: In fact, she didn't raise her prices for more than 30 years.

Pause for a moment at the

⑩ Corner of 135th Street and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Boulevard

You are standing on the spot that once was the heart of Harlem. Diagonally across from you, the castlelike building that is now oddly topped by a middle school (Thurgood Marshall Academy) was once Smalls Paradise, one of Harlem's most popular nightclubs from the 1920s to the 1940s, attracting a crowd of mixed races and some of the top jazz musicians in the city. Malcolm Little, later known as Malcolm X, worked here briefly as a waiter until he was fired for giving the number of a prostitute to a customer, thus beginning his downward plunge into criminal activities (before his conversion to Islam). His experience is detailed in his renowned autobiography. In the 1960s, basketball star Wilt Chamberlain bought the place and briefly brought it back to life as "Big Wilt's Small's Paradise."

Down the street from Smalls at 244 W. 135th St. was the headquarters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It was here that W. E. B. DuBois edited *The Crisis* (1909–1934), the monthly NAACP magazine, which at its peak had over 100,000 subscribers. Along with DuBois's searing editorials, *The Crisis* was the first major magazine to publish the works of Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson. In 1917, the NAACP organized a famous silent march in which 10,000 people walked down Lenox Avenue to protest the East St. Louis Race Riots in which 200 African Americans were killed and over 6,000 burned out of their homes. Walked in dignified silence, this march is widely seen as one of the precursors to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s peaceful marches in the 1960s.

Turn left and head east down 135th Street, stopping in front of the

⑪ YMCA (180–181 W. 135th St.)

It's difficult to underestimate the importance of the YMCA to Harlem. Its hotel facilities housed many prominent visiting African Americans who were excluded from white hotels downtown (including Langston Hughes, when he first arrived, and James Baldwin). The earlier branch (at 181 W. 135th St., on the south side of the street), had a renowned theater program that trained a number of black performers, including Eartha Kitt, Sidney Poitier, James Earl Jones, and Cicely Tyson. And in the gyms you'd often find baseball greats Willie Mays and Jackie Robinson working with local youth (now, how many Ys can boast that?).

Next to the YMCA is

⑫ 187 W. 135th St.

Poet, scholar, lawyer, composer, and NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson lived here between 1925 and 1938. The first African-American lawyer admitted to the Florida bar, the multi-talented Weldon authored "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which is known as the African-American National Anthem; and Teddy Roosevelt's campaign song, "You're all right, Teddy!" (for which he was rewarded with posts as consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua).

Take a few more steps until you're standing in front of

⓭ 145 W. 135th St.

In 1911, another barrier was broken when Reverend Hutchinson Bishop of St. Philip's Episcopal Church persuaded the owners of the row of tenements you see before you to sell them to him for his parishioners. Bishop was a light-skinned man, the developer thought he was white, and soon nearly half a block of formerly restricted real estate was in the hands of black homeowners. The buildings were sold for $640,000, the largest real estate transaction by an African American in the city's history up to that point. Though the paper, the *Harlem Home News,* entreated homeowners to "wake up and get busy before it is too late to repel black hordes," more and more African Americans came to Harlem and by the 1920s, 70% of the blacks living in New York City were in Harlem.

At the end of the block, on the corner of Lenox Avenue, stop in front of the

⓮ Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

This groundbreaking branch of the New York Public Library, the largest repository for African-American documents and artifacts in the world, was founded by Arturo Schomburg of Puerto Rico. When in elementary school, Schomburg asked his teacher why they never learned anything of the black history of Puerto Rico. His teacher responded that blacks had never done anything worth studying, and he vowed to prove her wrong. When the N.Y. Public Library bought his collection (and brought him on to manage it), it consisted of 5,000 items; today, the Schomburg has more than five million.

If you have a moment, enter the building and take in whatever special exhibition the center has on tap (they're usually quite well done). Langston Hughes asked that his ashes be buried in a library, and you'll find them here, in the main entry hall.

You can end your walking tour here, or you can hop a ❷ or ❸ train (or stroll) downtown to 125th Street. From the subway station, walk west (the numbers should be descending) to

⓯ 55 W. 125th St.

Do you hear the faint whine of a saxophone? That could mean that Harlem's most famous tenant, former President Bill Clinton, is in his office on the top floor of this out-of-place high-rise building. You may remember that he decided to move to Harlem after a public outcry over the taxpayer-supported rent on his proposed Carnegie Hill office space (a whopping $850,000 per year, more than all of the other presidential offices combined) sent him scurrying uptown. He pays a little over $350,000 a year here. It is, of course, highly appropriate that he's here, as Harlem is one of the Business Empowerment Zones his administration created. The decor of the office was created by Sheila Bridges, who also designed for rap mogul Sean "Puffy" Combs.

Two blocks from the office is **Mont Morris Park,** named for Gen. Roger Morris in honor of the very first American victory in the Revolutionary War. It was in the vicinity of where you're standing now, on Sept. 16, 1776, that George Washington engaged in what he called a "brisk little skirmish" with the Redcoats. Just 1 month earlier, the largest British expeditionary fleet in history had sailed into New York Harbor, bringing with it 21,000 troops,

a full 40% of all of the men engaged by the Royal Navy at that time. In quick order, these trained soldiers slaughtered approximately 2,800 American militiamen at the Battle of Brooklyn, forcing Washington to escape Brooklyn under cover of night and hightail it to the northern reaches of Manhattan. At the small battle on this site, called the Battle of Washington Heights, enemy buglers taunted the colonists by playing the call that traditionally ended a foxhunt. Enraged, Washington called for reinforcements and drove the Redcoats back to what is now the Upper West Side. It was the first time his soldiers had won an engagement and did much to boost morale. It also bought Washington the time to escape Manhattan altogether and "live to fight another day."

Retrace your steps and keep walking west on 125th Street until you reach Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard. Cross the street and continue walking west; you're now strolling the

16 "Great Black Way"

Like its counterpart downtown (Broadway's "Great White Way"), this was the theater district of Harlem. Only a few of these great show palaces still exist, but right in front of you should be the most famous and influential: **The Apollo Theater** (253 W. 125th St.). A whites-only burlesque house until 1934, it changed its policy and its lineup, becoming a music hall in January of that year and introducing the legendary "Amateur Night" a few months later. Among the many big names who jumpstarted their careers at Amateur Night: Sarah Vaughn, Lauryn Hill, James Brown, and most famously Ella Fitzgerald, who was planning to dance but fortuitously changed her mind backstage right before she went onstage. Amateur night continues here every Wednesday night at 7:30pm, and it's as raucous as ever, with wild cheers for the performers the audience enjoys and painfully cruel shouts and boos for those who get the axe.

Look across the street to what is left of

17 Blumstein's Department Store

When it opened its doors in 1900, this was the neighborhood's largest and most exclusive store, built at a cost of $1 million (notice the beautifully worked copper ornamentation on the facade, a mix of Art Deco and Spanish Renaissance in its patterning). In 1934, the Urban League began a campaign, spearheaded by Reverends John H. Johnson and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., to boycott and picket the store until it changed its hiring practices. Up until that point, though the vast majority of its clientele was African American, Blumstein's refused to hire any black store clerks (a particularly maddening policy as this was the Great Depression and jobs were scarce). The action lasted 2 months, with picketers carrying signs with the simple but effective request DON'T BUY WHERE YOU CAN'T WORK. Blumstein's finally relented, hiring 34 African-American women as clerks. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., often spoke of this strike in his speeches, as an example of the power of non-violent protest.

In 1958, Dr. King himself was at the center of history at Blumstein's. He was seated at a table signing copies of his book *Strides Towards Freedom* when an African-American woman named Izola Ware Curry got to the front of the line. After asking, "Are you Martin Luther King?" she pulled a letter opener out of the book she was carrying. Shouting "You Communist, you Communist!" she stabbed him in the chest. Dr. King was rushed to Harlem Hospital with the blade still in (had it

been removed he would have bled to death) and underwent surgery. The next morning the *New York Times* reported that had King sneezed, he would have died, as the blade was touching his aorta. From his hospital bed, King issued a letter of forgiveness to Wade, who was committed to an insane asylum for the act (she had had a long history of mental instability).

Retrace your steps and walk back to Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard, crossing the street so that you're standing on the corner of the block that houses the massive State Office Building.

18 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and 125th Street

Abuzz with history, this intersection is one of the most important in Harlem. Look over first at the windswept northwest corner, the spot where Malcolm X spent many long hours lecturing to Harlem residents on behalf of the Nation of Islam. His message—"We are blacks first and everything else second"—was such a powerful one, and he was such an effective orator that before he left the NOI that organization had nearly half a million members (it dwindled rapidly after his resignation). His message, which rejected non-violence and condemned integration as cultural suicide, was a controversial one that went directly against the goals of the NAACP, the largest civil rights organization of the time.

Now, gaze up at the former

19 Hotel Theresa (2090 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.)

If your olfactory glands have any imagination, you may detect a hint of Cuban cigar smoke in the air. In 1960, a young Fidel Castro was scheduled to speak at the United Nations but no hotel in town would take him and his contingent. After he threatened to set up camp on the lawn of the United Nations, the government ordered the city hotels to accommodate him, but Castro got into an argument with the hotel he had picked, the Shelburne. So, after a conversation with Malcolm X, he moved up here to the Hotel Theresa, the tall white building with geometric patterns climbing up its facade (you may want to cross the street to get a better look). It was a dramatic gesture, and one he hoped would show his solidarity with Black Americans (and perhaps encourage a few to register with the Communist Party). Repeated clashes between the pro- and anti-Castro forces outside the hotel kept the 258-police contingent assigned to Castro busy. On his second day at the Theresa, Nikita Khrushchev came to visit, and his police contingent plus Castro's created the greatest show of force Harlem had ever witnessed (to this day it hasn't been matched).

Four years later, when Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam to found his own Organization of Afro-American Unity (open to people of all religions), he held his press conference at the Theresa and soon afterwards moved his offices here. When he was assassinated in 1965, just 1 year later, this is where crowds gathered to mourn until they were dispersed by the police.

If you have the time, walk 1 block east and end your tour with a cocktail at the

20 Lenox Lounge (288 Malcolm X Blvd., just south of 125th St.)

This is the only major Harlem jazz club still operating from the days of Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong. Stop in for a drink, or just take a peek at the faux zebra-skin walls

and Art Deco frills that served as a backdrop to most of the Jazz Era greats, especially Billie Holliday, who was a regular here.

Note: You may also want to stop in at the **Studio Museum** (p. 163), Harlem's major art museum, which you'll pass along the way to the Lounge.

Walking Tour 3: Greenwich Village & Soho

Start: Under the arch at Washington Square Park (take the R or W to 8th Street, or the A, B, C, D, E or F to West 4th Street)
Finish: The Little Singer Building, 561 Broadway
Time: 2½ hours
Best times: On the weekend, when the Village and SoHo are alive with musicians, shoppers, and stylish downtowners lounging at sidewalk cafes
Worst times: It's never a bad time to take a stroll in these two areas

Harlem and Lower Manhattan, the first two walking tours in this chapter, have had relatively stable identities over the years. Though originally farmland, Harlem for the last 2 centuries has been primarily a residential neighborhood of some sort, never a center for commerce or industry. Lower Manhattan began as both a residential and commercial zone, but it morphed into a center of commerce and industry in the 19th century, and has remained that way over the years.

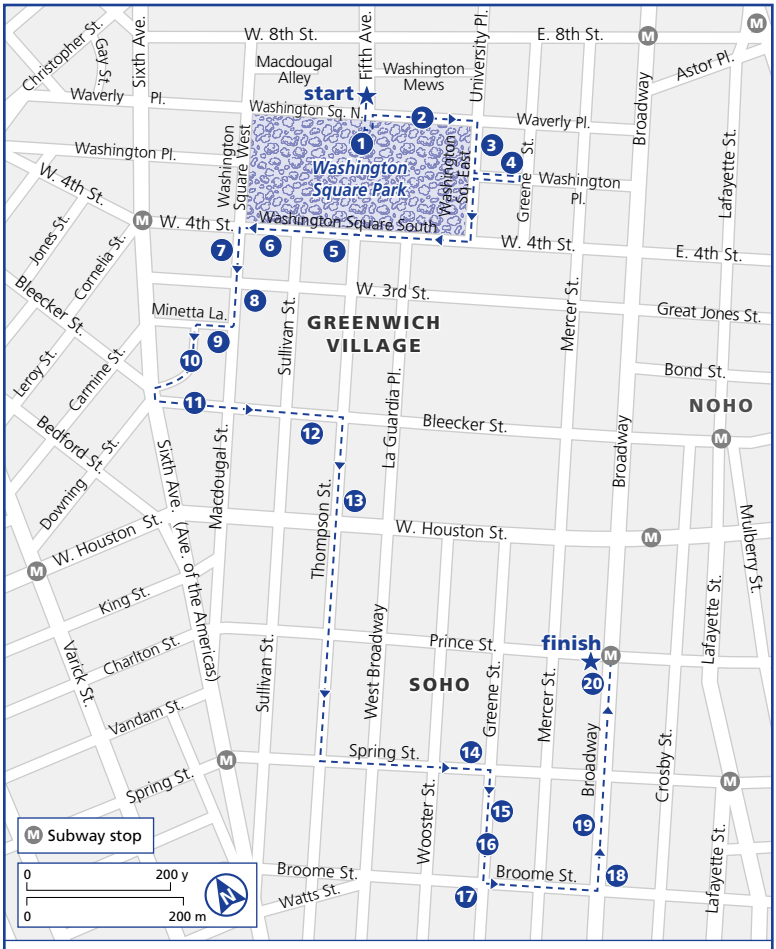
But SoHo and Greenwich Village? Identity whiplash. Most tend to think of these two neighborhoods as havens for artists, eccentrics, and bohemians, but that's only part of the story.

Greenwich Village started as its own village, a place where, as in Boccaccio's *Decameron,* the well-to-do fled on a near-yearly basis to escape the plagues of colonial Nieuw Amsterdam and New York (recurrent bouts of yellow fever mostly). Building began in earnest in the 1820s and 1830s, as wealthy families threw up row house after row house in what was supposed to be a suburb of the city. Soon, of course, the city had caught up, the hoi polloi were living just down the block, and the blue bloods did the 19th-century version of urban flight and moved a mile uptown to the newest suburbs. Their swank one-family houses were subdivided into cheap apartments and boarding houses, or torn down entirely to create factories, and the neighborhood became one of immigrants and later, artists. The Village always retained its status as a place apart, however, thanks to the confusing configuration of its streets, a jumble of twisting byways and narrow streets.

"The streets have run crazy and broken themselves . . . into strange angles and curves," O. Henry wrote. "One street crosses *itself* a time or two." In the 1960s and '70s it was the charm of this urban topography, the quiet of the tiny streets cut off from the bustle of upper Manhattan, that brought the well-to-do back, and the neighborhood reverted to its 1830s self as a hideaway for wealthy New Yorkers (with some exceptions).

A similar do-si-do of social movements ran its course in SoHo, with town houses becoming factories becoming artist's lofts becoming homes for mega-millionaires. I

Walking Tour: Greenwich Village & SoHo



1 Washington Square Park
2 Washington Square North
3 Silver Center
4 Former Triangle Shirtwaist Factory
5 Judson Church
6 New York University Law School
7 Provincetown Playhouse
8 Former home of Louisa May Alcott
9 Minetta Tavern
10 Minetta Street
11 Bleecker Street
12 Former home of Theodore Dreiser & Allen Ginsberg
13 Former home of Frank Zappa
14 Manhattan Bistro
15 72 Greene Street
16 Greene Street
17 Gunther Building
18 Haughwout Building
19 Former St. Nicholas Hotel
20 Little Singer Building

hope in this walking tour to give you a taste of all the varied groups of people and social movements that shaped these two neighborhoods over the years.

Stand at the arch in Washington Square Park, somewhere where you can get a good view into the interior of the park.

1 Washington Square Park

Hangings, protests, burials, parades . . . if there's another spot in New York that's seen as many different types of drama as Washington Square Park has, I've yet to hear of it. Located above the boundaries of the first Dutch settlement in Manhattan, the area was originally a marshland, fed by the stream that still runs under nearby Minetta Lane. Its first settlers were Nieuw Amsterdam slaves who were given partial freedom in 1641 in return for farming this then-dangerous and remote land. Older men and women were the primary settlers, as their usefulness to the colony was diminished, and the freedom was a mixed blessing. They were required to give over a large part of their harvests to the colony; and perhaps more disturbingly, were human watchdogs set here to alert the Dutch should local Indians or British forces try to attack.

In 1797, the land was designated a potter's field; it was put to good use a year later when yellow fever swept through what was by then New York City, part of the brand-new United States of America. Over 5% of the population of the city died that muggy, mosquito-infested summer (it was these pests that spread the illness), the poorest of whom were buried here in the drained swamp. Before it became a parade ground for the military in 1826, nearly 20,000 New Yorkers were laid to rest here. Tales are still told today of soldiers doing their maneuvers on the field, boots slipping through the crust of the dirt and crunching down on shroud-covered skeletons. If all this weren't enough of an invitation for hauntings, the square was often used for public hangings, the condemned strung up on the massive elm tree that still stands on the northwest corner of the park.

The magnificent white marble arch that you should be facing was designed by Stanford White, the second such arch he created for the city (the first, made of wood and plaster, was erected in 1889 to mark the centennial of George Washington's inauguration and to raise funds for this permanent one, which was completed in 1892). *Washington as President, Accompanied by Wisdom and Justice* is the sculpture on the right side of the arch, added to the arch in 1918 by Alexander Stirling Calder, father of the great modern artist and mobile-maker Alexander Calder. On the other side, we see *Washington as Commander-in-Chief, Accompanied by Fame and Valor* by Herman Atkins MacNeill (note the sword), also tacked on in 1918.

Over the years, the arch has become a choice target for protesters looking for something big and tall to seize. Dada daddy Marcel Duchamp made his way up the 110 interior steps (accompanied by other members of the Liberal Club, including a woman who liked to call herself "Woe," so she could declaim, "Woe is Me!") carrying Chinese lanterns, food, wine, and cap guns to declare Greenwich Village an "independent republic" in 1918. They were soon brought down by an unamused constable. A less lighthearted takeover took place in 1968 when the

Students Against Racism and War barricaded themselves inside to hang a banner protesting the Vietnam War. Don't you try to capture the arch: The door to the inner stairway has been bolted ever since.

2 Washington Square North (between Fifth Ave. and University Place)

Walk towards Washington Square North and gaze at the elegant line of town houses fronting the square between Fifth Avenue and University Place. You should be looking north now at what is the longest unbroken string of Greek Revival townhouses anywhere in the United States. Aren't they lovely? New York University owns most of these (in fact, it owns much of the neighborhood), but in the 1830s, when these were built, they were strictly for individual owners of the highest social class. Novelist Henry James's grandmother lived here and he used the pretensions of off-Park living as the centerpiece of his famed novel *Washington Square* (which was later turned into the movie *The Heiress,* starring Olivia DeHavilland). "The ideal of quiet and of genteel retirement, in 1835, was found in Washington Square," wrote James. "It has a kind of established repose which is not of frequent occurrence in other quarters of the long, shrill city; it has a riper, richer, more honourable look than any of the upper ramifications of the great longitudinal thoroughfare—the look of having had something of a social history."

The use of Greek Revival architecture for the area was in no way accidental. In the mid-1820s, support for the Greeks in their fight for independence against the Ottoman Empire was all the rage among the upper echelons of Manhattan society. Balls were held, collections taken, special theatrical performances given, all to help this Christian nation, inheritor of the mantle of classical Athenian democracy, win freedom from the Turkish "heathens." Because so many wealthy New Yorkers identified with this struggle, seeing America as the current iteration of ideal Greek democracy, classical columns started popping up on buildings all over town, with Greek symbols incorporated into fences (as you'll see in front of you), pedestals added to facades, and so on.

By the early 20th century, the strip had become run-down and many of the Village's best-known "bohemians" moved in, including painter Edward Hopper. He lived at 3 Washington Sq. N. from 1913 all the way through 1967. Other residents of that building over the years have included writer John Dos Passos and painter Thomas Eakins.

Walk east towards University Place (on your left if you're facing Fifth Ave.) and stop at the

3 Silver Center (corner of Washington Sq. E. and Washington Sq. N.)

Dash-dot-dot-dash—you've now reached the birthplace of the telegraph. Inventor Samuel Morse lived in this New York University building (he was a painting instructor) when, in 1836, he formulated the rudiments of the telegraphic alphabet, better known as Morse code. A year later, on Sept. 2, 1837, he was able to gather 1,700 feet of copper wire, which he coiled around his room, sending the world's first wire dispatches from one end to the other. Witnessing the monumental event was student Alfred Vail, son of the owner of the Speedwell Iron Works in New Jersey. Vail convinced his father to invest in the new invention and, when capital met product, a new means of communication was born.

Walk 1 block south (away from University Place), turn left on Washington Street, and walk until you get to

4 29 Washington St. (at the corner of Green St.)

It was here on March 25, 1911, that a horrific tragedy reshaped the laws of New York State and the history of the American labor movement. The day was a Saturday, yet 600 young women, mostly Jewish and Italian immigrants between the ages of 13 and 23, were hard at work in a garment factory on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of this building. They toiled in one of the most notorious sweatshops in the city, taxed by the owners for the needles they used, their clothing lockers, even the chairs they sat in.

At 5pm, the bell rang, and the girls started to get ready to leave when suddenly a fire sprang up in the southeastern corner of the eighth floor—no one has ever been able to determine the cause—and within minutes, the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors were an inferno. An inescapable inferno, because seconds later the girls discovered that many of the doors had been locked from the outside (to prevent theft, the owners said later). Minutes after that, one of the fire escapes collapsed and the elevator operator fled in terror. A brave pedestrian named Joseph Zito ran into the building and was able to make five trips up through the flames, saving 25 to 30 workers on each trip. To escape the flames, girls started jumping to their deaths in front of horrified passers-by. Those trapped inside suffocated from the smoke, while still others were crushed in a heap at the locked doors. In all, 146 people were killed at the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory, most within the first 10 minutes of the hour-long blaze.

After many protests and its own fire in the State House in Albany, the State Legislature responded to the tragedy by rewriting the labor code, making it the most stringent in the nation. The labor movement, struggling up until this point, gathered steam and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) became a force in the industry.

All was not rosy, of course. Nine months after the fire, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, owners of the factory, were acquitted on the charge of manslaughter in a trial many felt to be rigged. By the time of the trial, they were the proud owners of yet another sweatshop, just blocks from Washington Street, with no better working conditions for their laborers.

Walk back to Washington Square and follow the perimeter of the park south to 4th Street (aka Washington Sq. S.). Turn right and walk to Thompson Street.

5 Judson Church (239 Thompson St.)

The boxy, Romanesque Judson Church (1892) is another masterwork by architect Stanford White, who took his inspiration from the churches of Florence—this church's sensuous curved arches and stripes of yellow brick and terra cotta carry a hint of that ancient city. Built to commemorate the first American missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson, the church was a center of immigrant life at the turn of the 20th century, and a center for progressive politics in the later 1950s and '60s, when the minister Howard Moody (who called himself a "Christian Atheist") was at its helm, sheltering protesters from the police and helping to overturn the short-lived ban on folk-singing in the park (for

which today's Washington Square Park folksingers should be grateful).

Walk across Sullivan Street to

6 New York University Law School

Journalist John Reed (who was the subject of the Warren Beatty bio-pic, *Reds*) was a tenant of the famous boarding house that once stood here and wrote a poem about his neighbors, whom he called "Inglorious Miltons by the Score/ And Rodins, one to every floor."

If you get the chance, take a look at the street names on this side of Washington Square Park. All were chosen in honor of Washington's Revolutionary War generals.

Keep walking to MacDougal Street, turn left onto that street, and stop beside the legendary

7 Provincetown Playhouse (133 MacDougal St.)

The more theatrical strain of Greenwich Village bohemianism found its home at this little theater, which at one time was one of the most influential playhouses in the city. That's thanks largely to Eugene O'Neill, who managed it, and whose important early works were first performed here, including *Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape,* and *The Great God Brown.* Overturning barriers, the theater employed African Americans to play . . . African Americans, and even featured a kiss between a black man and a white woman (a radical move in 1926, and one that resulted in threats from the Ku Klux Klan). Other famous names who contributed to the theater include Edna St. Vincent Millay (her anti-war classic *Aria de Capo* debuted in 1919), John Reed, and ee cummings (as a playwright). Among the famous actors who trod these boards were Eva Le Galienne; Tallulah Bankhead; Katharine Cornell; and Bette Davis, who made her stage debut here. The theater is now owned by New York University (what isn't in this neighborhood!) and used for student productions.

Stroll south, crossing West 3rd Street until you see

8 130 MacDougal St.

This perfect little brick federal town house is where Louisa May Alcott probably wrote *Little Women* (can't you just picture Professor Baer calling on the young writer here?). Alcott never had her own Professor; her health damaged by her work as a nurse in Washington, D.C., during the Civil War, she never married, instead spending her limited energies on writing and lobbying for women's suffrage.

Take a Break

There are few better streets at which to grab a quick snack in the Village than MacDougal Street. For a pastry and some java, head to historic **Caffe Reggio (119 MacDougal St.; ☎ 212/475-9557; www.caffereggio.com; $),** which claims to have introduced cappuccino to America and has the huge, sculptural, copper machines to prove it. If you feel like something a bit more substantial, go Middle Eastern for fab falafels at **Mamoun's Falafel (119 MacDougal St.; www.mamounsfalafel.com; $)** or plates of creamy hummus at **Hummus Place (99 MacDougal St., near Bleecker St.; ☎ 212/533-3089; $).**

Continue downtown until you reach Minetta Lane, and take a look at

9 Minetta Tavern (113 MacDougal St.)

Formerly a speakeasy called the Black Rabbit, this was a major literary hangout of the day, serving up poetry-inspiring booze and heaping plates of

spaghetti to such notables as Ezra Pound, ee cummings, and Ernest Hemingway in the '20s; and Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Alan Corso in the '50s. Little-known fact: One of Middle America's favorite magazines, the very unbohemian *Readers Digest,* began its life in the Village, founded on this very spot. It continued to publish from the basement of the restaurant for half a dozen years before moving into proper offices.

Take a left onto Minetta Lane, and walk half its length (if you go to Sixth Ave., you've gone too far) to an unmarked, twisting street that's actually

⑩ Minetta Street

Listen carefully: A stream still runs below this street and on the rare quiet day, it's possible to hear it gurgling faintly below your feet. Though the street is now one of the most charming in the city, when the stream was at street level it was a muddy ghetto called "Little Africa" and inhabited entirely by free blacks from the 1820s through the 1910s. In 1863, when the draft riots surrounding the Civil War's first lottery for soldiers morphed into race riots, this was one of the few safe places for African Americans in the city. For 5 days, hundreds of white hooligans raged through the streets beating and lynching blacks, even burning down an orphanage for black children. It was the most violent riot of the century; 105 people were killed and many more maimed for life. But the narrow layout of Minetta Street allowed armed residents to successfully guard their homes and families from harm.

Soon after the Civil War, the area became notorious for its "black and tan" clubs, where whites and African Americans would socialize. It maintained its scandalous reputation into the Prohibition era, when nearly half the buildings on the street housed hidden speakeasies.

Follow Minetta Street around to Sixth Avenue and take a sharp left (do not cross Sixth Ave.) onto

⑪ Bleecker Street

Some things never change, including Bleecker Street. From the mid-19th-century through today, this has been a party place, lined with bars and cafes, and an integral part of the bohemian life in the Village. It's important to remember that the downside to the romanticized Village artist's life was crushing poverty. Young artists would spend hour upon hour in the cafes here not only to socialize and exchange ideas, but to stay warm (escaping often unheated tenement apartments) and to mooch food off more successful colleagues.

If you didn't get caffeinated earlier at Caffe Reggio, you may want to do so now, stopping at one of New York's oldest and most beloved coffee shops, the **Porto Rico Importing Company** (201 Bleecker St.). You may want to step in just for the ambrosial scent of the roasting beans.

Continue on Bleecker Street to

⑫ 160 Bleecker St.

This is the flophouse in which novelist Theodore Dreiser stayed when down on his luck. Later called the Greenwich and almost as seedy, it was a crash pad for poet Allen Ginsberg in 1951.

Head down Bleecker Street to Thompson Street, take a right, and you'll arrive at

⑬ 180 Thompson St.

This was the address of musician Frank Zappa in the 1960s. Lupa, a marvelous Italian restaurant owned by Mario

Batalli (consider returning here for lunch or dinner) is just next door at no. 170.

Head along Thompson Street, cross Houston Street into SoHo, and walk 2 blocks more to Spring Street. Turn left on Spring Street, cross West Broadway, and keep walking until you come to

14 The Manhattan Bistro (129 Spring St., between Wooster and Greene sts.)

Spring Street was named for the natural spring that burbled at this location. On top of that spring was a well (now in the basement of the Manhattan Bistro), where the most notorious murder of the 18th century took place. Three days before Christmas in 1799, a young milliner named Gulielma Sands told her cousins that she was to be wed that night to a fellow boarder in her house, Levi Weeks, a carpenter. She left that evening with Weeks and was never seen alive again. A week later her body was found floating in the Manhattan Well.

Weeks was accused of the crime and because he was then working on Alexander Hamilton's country estate Hamilton Grange (p. 231), he was able to convince that great man to serve as his defense lawyer (it didn't hurt that he had a wealthy uncle, either). Soon after, Hamilton's rival, Aaron Burr, owner of the well, joined the defense team, elevating it to the 1800s version of the "Dream Team." (Some speculate that Burr joined forces with Hamilton so that he could enjoy some of the publicity the trial was generating, as it was an election year.) Hamilton and Burr used the very 20th-century tactic, unusual at the time, of blaming the victim, claiming she was promiscuous and suicidal. And though half a dozen people were able to place Weeks with Sands on the night of the murder, he was acquitted. Legend has it that when the verdict was read, Sands's cousin Catharine Ring pointed at the defense team and judge, screaming: "If thee dies a natural death, I shall think there's no justice in heaven."

As we all know, Hamilton was not to die a natural death—just 4 years later his co-counsel killed him in a duel. The judge on the case, John Lansing, also met with an unusual end: He left his rooms at the City Hotel one day in 1829 and never returned. To this day, no one knows what became of him. Burr seems to be the only one to have escaped this curse, though his life after the duel was not a pleasant one. He served out his term as vice president while exiled from New York and New Jersey, suffered through financial difficulties, and was at one point made to stand trial for treason.

In a coda to the story: If you feel a chill as you read this, it could be a visit from Sands. Locals claim that she still haunts the area around the well.

Turn right onto Greene Street, walking downtown until you come to

15 72 Greene St.

We'll leap several decades into the future now, to the period just before the Civil War, when new materials and techniques, brought over from Britain, dramatically changed the way buildings were constructed in the U.S. Over a century earlier, in 1709, a British inventor named James Darby discovered that by adding coke (and later coal) to pig iron, he could create a new type of iron that was stronger and lighter and had more plasticity than traditional forms. Called cast iron, it caught on fairly quickly in England and started to be widely used in the U.S. in the 1840s. Soon it was all the rage, and the U.S. built more cast-iron buildings

than any other nation, the biggest collection of which—approximately 250—are right where you are now, in SoHo (the acronym stands for SOuth of HOuston).

The massive cream-colored warehouse building before you (known as the King of Greene St.) is one of the best examples of the genre. It looks like stone, doesn't it? In actuality, all of the elaborate French Renaissance details, window lintels, Corinthian columns, classical pediments, and the like, are cast iron from a foundry down on the Lower East Side. Building owners would get a catalogue, very much like a Sears catalogue, which would be filled with hundreds of drawings of facades and architectural details. They would order what they liked and construct the interior of the building (using some combination of cast-iron supports and brickwork or wood). Approximately 4 months later, crates of facade would arrive, which would then be screwed onto the front of the building (the screws hidden behind ornamental details). If the owner changed his mind about the look several years down the road—and this was not uncommon—he simply ordered another facade and had it slapped up in the old one's place. The wonder of these buildings is that, while they look like the loving work of skilled artisans, they are actually the essence of pre-fabrication.

They also represented a new type of architecture, one in which the weight of the building was carried by an interior skeleton of rolled iron beams rather than being borne by the exterior and interior walls. This technique allowed for much larger windows, important in the days before electricity, and was the precursor of the one used in modern skyscrapers, where skeletons of steel support "curtain walls" of glass.

You'll see cast-iron buildings throughout SoHo. To figure out if the building you're looking at is cast iron, you can knock on it (it will have a more hollow sound than stone), look for rust spots or, best yet, attach a magnet to it.

Take a moment to wander among the other magnificent buildings on

16 Greene Street

Like most areas of Lower Manhattan, SoHo had many different faces over the years. Until the late 1700s it was a natural landscape of meadows and marshes, dotted by country estates (including the estate of Aaron Burr). Residential buildings, primarily for the gentry, were constructed on Broadway following the draining of the marshes and the paving of that street in 1809. By the mid-1820s, this was the most populous ward in the city, a place of booming commerce, theaters, and saloons.

Fast-forward to the 1850s: The upper classes are moving out, their homes and fancy stores replaced by these industrial buildings, warehouses, and a heckuva lot of brothels, making SoHo the city's first red light district. Greene Street was the center of the action, with some 70 cathouses operating up and down this not-so-long street. Usually these "houses" were fronted by faux cigar stores, with little tobacco and a female salesperson at the front who would direct customers in the know to the back rooms. The brothels operated primarily in the daytime, with the peak of business taking place at lunchtime. An early guidebook called *A Directory of the Seraglios* by A. Free Loveyer was published in 1859, reviewing the goods and services at many of the houses. In a case of *"plus ça change. . . ,"* a number of current New York brothels were recently shut down,

having been discovered by the police who were monitoring their online advertisements (in which prostitutes were ranked in Amazon.com-like fashion, on their skills and beauty).

Continue walking south to Broome Street. On the corner, you'll see the landmark

17 Gunther Building

Another cast-iron beaut, the Gunther Building was named for William H. Gunther, the fur merchant who built this warehouse in 1872. Along with unusual curved corners, which demonstrate the remarkable plasticity of cast iron, the building once had two statues made of cast iron on pedestals jutting from the second floor.

Beyond the architecture, the Gunther is a landmark for its place in the history of contemporary art. It was here, in the mid-1960s, that the very first artist/squatters took up residence in SoHo. Urban pioneers, they occupied these decrepit industrial spaces, installed heat, plumbing, kitchens, and bathrooms . . . and then thought up ways to hide these kitchens and bathrooms from fire inspectors (as the area was zoned for industrial use only). Michael T. Kaufman of the *New York Times* reported that "one artist . . . would greet a building inspector on the stairs saying, 'Wait a minute. I have a nude model posing.' Then he would go inside and, using pulleys, hoist beds above a false ceiling and camouflage the refrigerator, range, and bathtub." The artists also had to worry about safety: At that time, SoHo was known among firefighters as "Hell's hundred acres" for all the fires that occurred in these buildings, thanks to their wooden floors, and their use as storage spaces for bales of paper, rags, and the like. But low rent, huge spaces, and large windows proved irresistible, and soon artists were flocking here in droves. In 1968, the first gallery in the area opened up; a decade later, there were 60 of them.

In 1971, the artists successfully lobbied the city to create its first artists' district, making it legal for them to live in the neighborhood. The one legal hurdle they had to overcome was receiving an "artistic certification" (a city-issued designation of "artist"—it involved bringing in a portfolio of work to show). Of course, being artists, no one wanted to wade into the city bureaucracy to pick up this official designation, and this has, unfortunately, resulted in a watering-down of the community. Most of the major galleries left a decade ago for more affordable digs, and the lofts are now as likely to be inhabited by stockbrokers as they are painters. Today, the average cost for a loft in the neighborhood is $25,000 per square foot—a big change from the '60s when artists were paying as little as $6 per square foot here.

Among the many artists who lived or still live in SoHo are: Christo, Louise Nevelson, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella.

Face the Gunther Building, and turn left (east); walk on Broome Street until you come to Broadway. Across the street you should see the monumental

18 Haughwout Building

With cast-iron facades facing both Broadway and Broome Street (there's a Staples on the first floor), this is the structure that began the rage for cast-iron buildings when it was erected in 1858, the first of its kind in New York. I think it's a sensationally beautiful structure; it's been called the "Parthenon of Cast-Iron Architecture in America" and is on the National Historic Register. Designed by architect

John Gaynor, the repeating arches, fluted Corinthian columns, and 92 windows on its facade are meant to call to mind the San Sorvino Library of Venice. Daniel D. Badger, owner of the largest foundry in the city, was so proud of his work on the Haughwout that he placed the building on the cover of all his catalogues.

The interior of the building, a world-famous housewares emporium, was just as swank, boasting the first passenger elevator in the world (made by Otis, it was the beginning of that company's empire), electrical lights, and a rare amenity for those days—central heating. It was here that Mary Todd Lincoln went on shopping sprees to outfit the White House, earning her a Marie Antoinette–like reputation for profligacy in the newspapers by spending hundreds of dollars of the government's money for hand-painted china while the Civil War raged.

Turn left onto Broadway and walk slightly north to

19 521 and 523 Broadway

This is all that remains of the once grand St. Nicholas Hotel, which was built at a cost of $1 million in 1854 (a huge sum in those days). Sold off in pieces over the years, it once occupied the entire length of the block, giving shelter to nearly 1,500 people per night. Its ballrooms hosted the grandest fêtes of the decade. Now all you can see are these two slices, with other buildings located in between them.

During the Civil War, the St. Nicholas was requisitioned by the War Department for use as its New York headquarters, though it continued to operate as a hotel. On Nov. 25, 1864, Confederate agents attempted to create a panic—or worse—by setting fires in the heart of New York City. Checking in to the St. Nicholas and 11 other hotels, all located on Broadway, the agents went into their rooms and mixed together "Greek Fire," a combustible mixture of sulfur, naphtha, and quicklime that can cause a mighty blaze when exposed to air. One after another, beginning at 8:45pm, sometimes in multiple rooms in a hotel, flames erupted. Though the fire force was stretched thin, they managed—with the help of hotel staff and customers—to extinguish every blaze, saving the hotels, and possibly the city, from what could have been a catastrophic fire.

Continue Uptown to the

20 "Little Singer" Building (561 Broadway)

We end our tour with the building that could be seen as the epilogue of the cast-iron movement, as New York and other cities moved into the age of steel (which appeared on the scene in the 1890s and was stronger and more flame retardant). An avant-garde mix of steel and cast-iron elements, it's a pip, with trellises as filigreed as any you'd see in the French Quarter of New Orleans, and acres of windows. All that glass is an important innovation. Architectural critics have said that the metal-and-glass-skin of the Little Singer is a precursor to the international style of architecture—those big glass boxes—that was to flower half-a century later. Designed by Ernest Flagg, it was built for the Singer Manufacturing Company (famous for its sewing machines) in 1904, 4 years before the much larger Singer Building was completed in the Financial District (now demolished, it was the tallest building in the world for a little over a year).

9 Attention, Shoppers!

Introducing one of NYC's favorite pastimes

WHY DO THE MAJORITY OF VISITORS TO NEW YORK DESCEND ON THE CITY in fall and early winter? They come here to shop. In the run-up to Christmas, Chanukah, Kwaanza, and other big-spender holidays, avid shoppers storm the city because they know that if you can't find it in the Big Apple . . . well, it simply doesn't exist. In this chapter, I attempt to bring some order to the massive number of shopping options in the Big Apple, from the big department stores to the flea markets to the direct-from-the-designer sample sales (a hidden bounty for power shoppers).

THE CITY'S 10 BEST SHOPPING AREAS

Often in the Big Apple, finding what you want has less to do with picking the right store than with choosing the right area in which to shop. Similar types of stores tend to cluster together, making it quite easy for shoppers to flit from one to the next, comparing merchandise and prices. Here, beginning at the bottom of Manhattan and working my way north, is my list of the city's best shopping streets and their areas of specialty.

- **Duane Street, between Greenwich and Hudson streets** (1 to Franklin St.). A delightful block of antiques and fine furniture stores, with such unusual options as Brazilian collectibles and "pop" furniture options. My home block of **10th Street between Broadway and University Place** has a similar confluence of antique furniture stores, the emphasis on my block being European and Art Deco pieces.
- **Canal Street, between Mott and Lafayette streets** ☆☆ (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R to Canal St.). Best for super-cheap knock-off accessories: purses in the style of Kate Spade, watches of all types, beaded jewelry, sunglasses, and luggage. If you're planning to buy a T-shirt to commemorate your New York vacation, buy it here for half of what you'd spend in Times Square. ***Tip:*** Very few stores in this area use price tags because bargaining is expected. Be prepared to walk away if a price seems too high—often the mere gesture of turning towards the door will halve the cost.
- **Broadway, between West Houston and Canal streets** ☆☆ (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R to Canal St. or R, Q to Prince St.). Club Kid Central. If you're between the ages of 15 and 29, and want affordable, flashy fashions similar to what you'll see on MTV, this is where to shop. See below for my description of Yellow Rat Bastard, the epicenter of this clothing scene. You'll find a similar crop of shops on **Lafayette Street, between Houston and Spring streets.**

- **Bleecker Street, between Sixth and Eighth avenues** ★★★ (A, E, C to 14th St.). Boutique heaven. If cutting-edge style is your thing and you have the pocketbook to support that appetite, the small stores along this block have all the latest fashions, with friendlier service than you'll find Uptown. There's a similar if sometimes more avant-garde scene in **Nolita,** on Elizabeth, Mott, and Mulberry streets, from Broome to West Houston streets (F, V to Lafayette St., or 6 to Prince St.).
- **9th Street, between Second Avenue and Avenue A** ★ (6 to Astor Place, L to First Ave.). New, younger designers tend to pick this street, so you'll find a terrific assortment of "only in New York" fashions, along with shops of designers who have now become a bit more established, vintage stores, and bridal boutiques. If you have the time, wander down to St. Marks Place and 7th Street for similar stores (though not as many as you'll find on 9th St.). **Ludlow Street,** between Stanton and Delancey streets (F, V to Houston St.), has lately seen a blossoming of these little boutiques as well.
- **Fifth Avenue, between 14th and 23rd streets** (R, Q to 23rd St. or 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, L to Union Sq.). Home furnishings and brand-name fashions. With EJ Audi on this strip, along with Restoration Hardware, Eileen Fisher, Armani, Gap, Banana Republic, and J. Crew, you have somewhat of a mall atmosphere, with a few more interesting stores mixed in.
- **Sixth Avenue, between 16th and 23rd streets** (1 to 18th St. or B, F to 23rd St.). Land of the bargain superstores, with Bed Bath and Beyond; a huge Old Navy; and Filene's Basement leading the charge.
- **Fifth Avenue, between 38th and 57th streets** ★ (N, R to 50th St. or E, V to 53rd St. and Fifth Ave.). This window-shoppers' paradise is home to such grand old beauties as Saks Fifth Avenue, Tiffany & Co., and Bergdorf Goodman, along with a number of other luxury outlets.
- **Madison Avenue, 62nd through 86th streets** (6 to 66th, 79th, or 86th sts.). Overpriced baubles and garments for the ultra-rich as far as the eye can see. On Madison, you'll find the flagship branches for Ralph Lauren, Chanel, Hermès, and Prada.
- **47th Street, between Fifth and Sixth avenues** ★ (B, F to Rockefeller Center). New York's famed Diamond District, with more than 2,600 small and large businesses located on this single block. Ninety percent of the diamonds that come into the U.S. go through New York City, many of them through this street, so you're practically guaranteed a good variety. You'll also get an extremely hard sell, and sometimes a bit of trickery, so research what you want before you come here, and make sure you're getting an untreated stone (if you're looking for the real thing). Be prepared to walk away if you're not satisfied. There are also a number of jewelry shops on Canal Street between Broadway and Houston Street, but the quality is generally better here.
- **Madison Avenue, between 86th and 96th streets** (4, 5, 6 to 86th St.). Veruka Salt, the spoiled rich girl in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,* would love this neighborhood. Store after store caters to the pampered tykes of the Upper East Side; you'll find exquisite children's togs, mostly imported, though prices can be astronomical.

THE TOP DEPARTMENT STORES FOR BARGAIN HUNTERS

Classier than Macy's (see below) and a bit more logical in terms of layout, **Bloomingdales** ★★ (1000 Third Ave. between 59th and 60th sts.; ☎ 212/705-2000; www.bloomingdales.com; 4, 5, 6, to 59th St., or N, R to Lexington Ave.) is a shopping behemoth with enough excitement to keep shopaholics occupied for at least several hours. Founded in 1872 as a hoopskirt store, the vast emporium is still in the forefront of fashion with four complete floors just for garments (basement for men's; 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors for women's). It also sells housewares, furniture, kid's clothing, luggage, kitchen tools, accessories, cosmetics, and jewelry, but its strength are the clothes. Every week Bloomies puts some department or part of a department on sale, so be sure to check out local newspapers to see what the buys are when you're here. Weekdays before lunch tend to be the least crowded time to visit, and anyone who purchases over $50 of merchandise is entitled to a free tchotchke at the Visitor's Center, so save your receipts if you have someone not too picky to whom you owe a gift.

Though it's near-heresy to say so, I count **Century 21** (22 Courtland St. between Broadway and Church St.; ☎ 212/227-9092; www.century21.com; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, M to Fulton St.) as the most overrated store in the city. A four-floor discount department store right across from the World Trade Center site, it made its reputation by selling designer clothing, shoes, and housewares at steeply discounted prices. But though the clothing may say "Calvin Klein," "Mosconi," or "DKNY," I've found that in nine out of ten cases, the really inexpensive offerings look nothing like the goods you'd get from these designers at retail stores. Instead, the fabrics are the cheapest polyesters, the colors gaudy, the fit off, and even the labels themselves look different (grab a DKNY here and instead of those classy, blocky letters that are the mark of the line, the label has a cutesy script, like something taken from a schoolgirl's autograph book). I suspect this is where designers go to unload the terrible mistakes they've made, or perhaps to peddle lines of cheaper goods, created explicitly for this store and others like it. I've seen otherwise sane, well-dressed women with their arms stacked full of clothes that shouldn't be worn outside the center ring at Ringling Brothers, simply because it had a label which marked it as "a find."

That being said, I have friends who swear by the place and tell me that the key is to hit it at the right time (though they can't give advice on how to do that) and to really dig deep. I counter that you'll usually find better buys at sample sales and consignment shops. My advice to you, dear reader, would be: If you happen to be in the area, try your luck. But look at the piece itself and judge its value by that. After all, nobody actually sees the label when you're wearing the clothes, right?

With approximately one million items for sale and a huge two-building space that stretches the very long block between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, **Macy's** ★ (151 W. 34th St.; ☎ 212/695-4400; www.macys.com; B, D, F, N, Q, R to 34th St.), "The World's Largest Store," is also one of New York's top tourist attractions. It has some of the best prices of the major department stores and, in general, higher-quality goods than Century 21, though the fashions here are definitely more middle-of-the-road. Designers and manufacturers represented include fashion stars (Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, Hugo Boss), chain-store

brands (Nine West, Esprit, Coach), and well-priced no-name labels. The basement is devoted to cookware, of which there's a dazzling variety; the house brand of pots and pans (called Tools of the Trade) may be the best buy—well-made and usually quite inexpensive. And the return policy here is one of the most generous in the city, so mistakes are not irrevocable. Just as with Bloomingdales, be sure to look for coupons in local papers; most weeks, there's some sort of special going on. Those are the reasons you should visit. But there are also reasons you may want to pop a Valium before you attempt it. The vast scale of Macy's and the huge crowds it attracts are its Achille's heel, as there's no other place in New York quite so confounding to shop. There's never a salesperson around when you need one; on sale days the masses can be crushing; and even native New Yorkers get lost here, wandering for half an hour at a time trying to get to the right department.

One note for history buffs: Macy's escalators were the first to be installed in any store anywhere in the world and the originals are still in use in some areas of the store (look for the wood-slatted ones).

I'm including **Pearl Paint** ★ (308 Canal St., on the corner of Lafayette St.; ☎ 212/431-7932; www.pearlpaint.com; R, Q, 4, 5, 6 to Canal St.) in this discussion of department stores because in the last few years it has expanded so greatly that it truly has become one of the city's top stores, and not just for art supplies. It's taken possession of three more buildings to make more room for the furniture it now sells, its home decorating center, frame shop, and craft center. In fact, the only items you probably *can't* find here are clothes (though you just may be able to make some artful ones with the available supplies). This, "The World's Largest Discount Art Store," is truly one-stop shopping for do-it-yourselfers of all stripes, and its boast is true: The prices here are terrific, often 50% lower than what you'll find in other areas of the city, or in the country, for that matter. What you'd expect to find (and will): paints, pastels, pencils, airbrushes, pottery supplies, brushes, rollers, and paper-making supplies. What you might not expect to find (but will): children's art kits, chichi stationery, writing journals, lanyards, needlepoint supplies, chairs, tables, and office supplies. ***One warning:*** Shopping here can involve using a lot of stairs, so ask one of the helpful sales staff (they're all artists) to point you towards the hidden elevator in the back.

If you're like me, **Pearl River Mart** ★★★ kids (477 Broadway at Broome St.; ☎ 800/878-2446 or 212/431-4770; www.pearlriver.com; A, C, J, M, N, R to Canal St.) will unleash yens you never knew you had. Walk into this blockwide, two-story department store dedicated to goods imported from Asia, and you'll suddenly realize how much you desperately need lacquered chopsticks, or a silk brocade Mandarin shirt, or that industrial-sized bag of rice crackers. It happens every time.

Part of the seduction is the grand size of the place; the bright colors, intricate designs and silky textures of the clothes; and the dazzling number of choices. On the first floor alone are dozens of brocade sheath dresses, Mao shirts, beaded slippers, and quilted jackets; racks of ceramic and pottery tableware as far as the eye can see; Asian foods of all kinds (just the number of different ramen soups is staggering); and candles, lamps, toys, and doodads. In the basement you'll find rice cookers, kung fu and Mary Jane shoes, bamboo shades, paper lanterns, more plates and bowls, herbs, shampoos, and more. Prices are extremely reasonable. I've found lovely silk shirts marked down to just $15, a wedding-gift-worthy hand-glazed

Japanese bowl going for just $25, and fun lamps for a mere $15. And if all the shopping tires you out, simply retire to the mezzanine tearoom for a tea break—green tea, of course.

SHOPPING THE SAMPLE SALES

I have a handful of friends, native New Yorkers all, who haven't set foot in a department store or retail clothing store in at least 5 years. Instead, they do all their apparel shopping—all of it!—at the sample sales that designers hold at showrooms and warehouses across the garment district. Top names in fashion (and all of the major designers in the U.S. still have their offices in New York) sell their clothing directly to the public at discounts of up to 80% off regular prices. Jewelry, outerwear, sweaters, socks, suits, wedding gowns—you can find all these items at sample sales. And these are not damaged goods; very often it's the sample clothing made to show retailers what's on offer, discontinued lines, canceled store orders, or overstocks.

As there are literally hundreds of these showrooms in Manhattan—still the garment capital of the U.S.—there are sales every single weekday of the year (with the exception of holidays, of course). The spring and fall months have the most sample sales, though in recent years over 200 sales have been held in the months of November and December. The deals can be remarkable. My favorite buy was a pair of chocolate-brown Donna Karan slacks that I got for just $35; retail, they would have cost twice that amount, and they're the genuine article, in a soft high-quality wool that's lasted me 6 years.

One note: Though I've found things in all sorts of sizes of the years, in general these sales are better for those who wear the smaller sizes. You're going to find a lot more size 6s than size 14s, though I have seen both at sales (and sizes will also vary by designer; for example, at an Eileen Fisher sale you won't have any problems finding larger sizes, though you might at Juicy Couture).

So how do you find a sample sale? Well, if you simply stroll the not-too-picturesque area between 42nd Street and 32nd Street on Broadway or Seventh

Strategies for Sample Sales

Avoid lunchtime shopping: Crowds of office workers shop the sales during their lunch hours. Shop early in the day to get the best merchandise.

Wear tight-fitting or terrifically baggy clothes: Because many showrooms don't provide dressing rooms, you need to wear clothing that you can try clothes on over or under. And be sure to try on the clothing because there are no refunds on these types of sales.

Bring cash: Some sample sales do not accept credit cards.

Be prepared to hunt: Much of the merchandise may be in cardboard boxes on the ground, so be prepared to dig through clothing to get the best buys.

Avenue, you'll be handed half a dozen flyers inviting you to sales happening that day. Or you can look at the following publications for daily or weekly listings:

- *Time Out New York* (at newsstands)
- *Daily Candy* (www.dailycandy.com, sign up for free membership)
- *NY Sale* (www.nysale.com)
- *New York Magazine* (also online at http://nymetro.com)

There are also certain venues that serve as revolving warehouses for sample sales. I've had good luck at:

- **The Find Outlet** ★ (361 W. 17th St., at Ninth Ave.; ☎ 212/226-5167; www.findoutlet.com; A, E, C to 14th St. or L to Eighth Ave.; or 229 Mott St. between Prince and Spring sts.). A specialist in women's wear but of a rarified ilk, with 50% discounts on such pricey designers as Juicy Couture, Michael Kors, Marc Jacobs, and True Religion.
- **Gabays** ★ (225 First Ave. at 13th St.; ☎ 212/254-3180; www.gabaysoutlet.com; L to First Ave.). Much of its merchandise is Bergdorf Goodman and Henri Bendel overstocks, meaning you're going to find such luxe designers as Jil Sander, Manolo Blahnik, Ermenegildo Zenga, Prada, and Jimmy Choo here for 40% to 75% below retail. A top place for both men and women, the store features shoes, lingerie, sunglasses, and handbags along with evening-wear and daywear.
- **Prato** (28 W. 34th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/629-4730; www.pratooutlets.com; N, Q, R, B, D, F to 34th St.; or 492 Seventh Ave. at 36th St.; same subways). The men's equivalent of the Find Outlet, with Ralph Lauren Polo shirts from $25, Bill Blass sweaters from $20, and suits from $89.
- **Soiffer Haskin** (www.soiferhaskin.com). An administrator of sales for different luxury-goods clients (including jewelry, clothing, and furniture), Soiffer Haskin tends to host events at the Metropolitan Pavillion at 123 W. 18th St., but there's a full list of upcoming sales on its website.
- **SSS Sample Sale** ★★ (261 W. 36th St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/947-8748; www.clothingline.com; A, E, C, 1, 2, 3 to 34th St.). Mostly women's clothing. In the past I've found fine cashmere sweaters for $50, Theory slacks for $40, and chic Salt jeans for half of what they go for in the department stores.

FLEA MARKETS

Every weekend a dozen or so flea markets pop up in neighborhoods all across the city, weaving their spells on those shoppers who enjoy the thrill of the hunt as much as the purchase itself. This being the Big Apple, prices may not be as low as those at the flea market in your local town, but there are always some real values to be had, as well as some utterly unique items you may not find elsewhere.

If you're into "fleaing," be sure to visit the following major markets:

- **The Green Flea** ★★ (Columbus Ave. between 76th and 77th sts.; Apr–Sept Sun 10am–5:45pm, Oct–Mar Sun 10am–5:15pm; B, C to 81st St. or 1 to 79th St.). The mother of all flea markets, this is where the contestants were challenged to test their merchandising skills on the first season of *The*

Apprentice. It's just as huge as it looked on TV, a vast public school playground and indoor gym, every inch covered with tables and tents holding a wide variety of goods. Along with the standard antiques and collectibles vendors—primarily jewelry, small furniture, and books—more unusual items pop up, such as an entire booth dedicated to antique kimonos; another one filled with a Harlem designer's sassy shrugs and embroidered jackets; a table filled with museum-worthy, working toasters from the '20s, '30s, '40s, and '50s; and a booth of elegant, tremendously inexpensive bamboo and wood furniture from the Philippines. If you're going to do only one flea market during your stay, this Sunday market should be it.

- **The Grand Bazaar** (25th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; Sat–Sun 10am–sunset; F, V to 23rd St.). Patience is required to shop at this market, a totally unorganized, higgledy-piggledy mess of tables crammed with goods, and clothing thrown down in heaps like it's laundry day. Still, there are some real gems to be found, especially if you're into African goods, as the market has the largest collection of African statuary, beads, and furniture of any of the fleas. Used tools, CDs, cameras, books, jewelry, and pies (baked by a local order of nuns raising money for their soup kitchen) are also on offer.
- **The Hell's Kitchen Flea Market** (39th St., between Ninth and Tenth aves.; Sat–Sun 10am–sunset; A, C, E to 34th St.). An entire block is shut down twice a week to make room for The Hells Kitchen market, which specializes in furniture and home goods, usually vintage. Unique here are the crystal chandelier booth that also sells a large assortment of individual crystals (for do-it-yourselfers?); the antique clothing-hooks booth; and the gramophone seller, who has a lot of old-looking brass instruments up for sale as well. Because this is such a large market, expect a good selection of clothing, jewelry, books, and small collectibles.

Tips for Flea-Market Shopping

1. **Bargain, bargain, bargain:** Always offer less than the price on the tag. That's put there as a rough estimate and vendors expect you to haggle, so don't let them down. If a vendor won't budge, ask if he'll throw in another item to sweeten the deal; you'll be surprised at how often he will.
2. **Bring cash:** Most vendors don't accept credit cards or checks, so make sure you have enough of the "green stuff" on your person.
3. **Visit late in the day:** The golden hour for sales is the hour before the market closes, when vendors begin to dread all the packing up they're going to have to do to get home for the night. You'll find them much more willing to bargain late in the day, and many will start posting sales as the sun dips down in the west.
4. **Be careful:** Once you've bought something at a flea market, it's usually yours for life, so check the merchandise carefully before you purchase.

- **The Unnamed Market at the corner of Spring and Wooster** ★ (daily 11am–6pm; R, Q to Prince St.). Another 7-day market, this is a small one, but I include it for the booths right on Spring Street and to the right as you face the market. Run by a collective of young designers, they offer a cheaper outlet for the original and well-crafted clothing these up-and-comers are making (some of which are already selling in Japan and in clothing stores at various venues in the States). Among the names you'll find at this booth (which may not sound familiar now, but I guarantee will in a couple of years) are Nancy Giallombardo, an exciting up-and-comer.
- **The Market** ★ (268 Mulberry St., between Prince and Houston sts.; www.themarketnyc.com; Sat–Sun only 11am–7pm; F, V to Houston St.). One step up from a flea market, this weekend market in the gym of St. Patrick's Youth Center is where many of New York's most promising young designers, about 60 in all, showcase their wares. Each rents a booth for the day, and sets out whatever they have made, primarily selling one-of-a-kind articles of clothing and jewelry. When I last visited I saw elaborately embossed T-shirts, hand-embroidered raincoats, hand-blown glass necklaces, feathered shoes, and handmade leather clutches all going for far less than they would in a conventional store (and some of these designers have advanced to selling goods in stores). What I like best about shopping here, besides the fact that you are sure to find unique apparel that's relatively inexpensive, is the lack of a hard sell. Instead of trying to talk customers into buying, many designers sit behind their little tables working on their next creation as you browse.

INDIVIDUAL STORES YOU'LL WANT TO VISIT

Beyond the fleas, the monolithic department stores, and random sample sales, the following stores offer consistent value and are worth special visits.

APPAREL FOR MEN & WOMEN

Basic clothing items—T-shirts, polos, underwear, sweatshirts, shorts, jogging pants—are the focus at **American Apparel** (1841 Broadway, at 61st St.; ☎ 212/772-7462; www.americanapparel.net; 1, A, B, C, D to Columbus Circle), and nearly every style comes in a rainbow of colors. The clothes are all made in the good ol' U.S. of A., with prices that are in line with the quality offered. For example, a basic T never costs more than $15, with thermal long-sleeve shirts selling for the same price.

I know fashion magazine editors who periodically pop over to **H&M** ★★★ (1328 Broadway at 34th St.; ☎ 212/564-9922; www.hm.com; N, R, B, D, F to 34th St.) to supplement their wardrobes with this European chain's knock-off fashions. Always reasonably priced, with an emphasis on basics (though trendier clothes are thrown in as well), these stores are getting to be well-known in the so-called "Blue States," though they haven't yet hit the deep South or Southwestern areas of the U.S. In addition to the Herald Square branch, there are NYC stores in Harlem, SoHo, and Midtown on the East Side (seven branches in all).

Though its price tags aren't the lowest of the low (I have usually found discounts to be about 25% to 35% off retail), **Loehmann's** ★★ (101 Seventh Ave., at 17th St.; ☎ 212/352-0856; www.loehmanns.com; 1 to 19th St.) offers the

types of clothing you'll find at the quality department stores at rates that are the equivalent of the department stores' once-in-a-while sales (and when Loehmann's itself has a special sale, the savings can be spectacular). The "back room" features progressive designers from Europe and the United States, the men's section has a terrific selection of quality button-downs (from such names as Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, and Zegna), and the woman's department is just brimming with distinctive suits, evening gowns, and coats.

Curious to know what the trends in fashion will be 6 months from now? Venture to the nearest **Urban Outfitters** (162 Second Ave., at 10th St.; ☎ 212/375-1277; www.urbanoutfitters.com; 6 to Astor Place; also 374 Avenue of the Americas at Waverly Place and 628 Broadway in SoHo), which always seems to be just ahead of the curve for street fashions, by which I mean clothing worn by trendy 20- and 30-somethings. Along with a wide variety of casual wear for both men and women, the stores have a smattering of groovy housewares as well (think throw pillows, small lamps, and rugs).

A splurge choice, **John Varvatos** ★★ (122 Spring St.; ☎ 800/965-0700; www.johnvarvatos.com; R, Q to Prince St.) is the best men's designer to come along in a decade, and his clothing is at once classic and ultra-hip. If you hit the store at the beginning or end of the season, you may get a sale, but even then, Johnny boy does not come cheap. Still, for one or two "wear a lot" pieces, the expenditure may be worth it. In late 2005, he added a small line of nifty women's wear.

Teenagers longing for "street cred" covet the duds at **Yellow Rat Bastards** ★ (478 Broadway, between Broome and Grand sts.; ☎ 877/YELL-RAT; www.yellowratbastard.com; Q, N, R, W, J, M, Z, 6 to Canal St.). Every belly-baring, low-riding label, flip-flop-flinging fashion is here, along with some of the hottest names in sneakers. The clothing is affordable even for those still relying on baby-sitting money.

CONSIGNMENT & VINTAGE CLOTHING SHOPS

A worthy excuse to trek out to Brooklyn, the 5,500-square-foot **Beacon's Closet** ★★ (88 N. 11th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn; ☎ 718/486-0816; www.beaconscloset.com; L to Bedford St.) trades in both trendy and vintage clothes, brought in by the fashionistas of this hip, artsy neighborhood. Very few items cost more than $20, and the selection is huge.

The oldest resale store in the nation—it was here in 1954 that the concept of re-selling lightly used designer wear was hatched—**Encores** ★★★ (1132 Madison Ave., between 84th and 85th sts.; ☎ 212/879-2850; www.encoreresale.com; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.) is still the standard-bearer, with the best prices and selection in Manhattan. The shop has two floors, which are divided into ready-to-wear and designer clothes. This being the hoity-toity Upper East Side, Chanel has the largest rack, though you'll also find Escada, Dolce and Gabbana, Armani, Calvin Klein, and the like, most from this season or last. On my last visit I pondered a lacy Marc Jacobs cocktail dress that still had its original price tag of $2,400; it was being sold for $340. ***One warning:*** You can't be shy here, as there's no door on the dressing room. The staff promises that it keeps men in the front of the store, near the small rack of menswear.

Right next door to Encores is **Bis Designer Resale** (1134 Madison Ave., between 84th and 85th sts.; ☎ 212/396-2760; www.BisBiz.com; 4, 5, 6 to

86th St.), with slightly higher prices but a larger selection of leathers and furs. "We get models, socialites, fashion designers, selling their clothing here," says owner Odiana Daulman. "Inventory changes daily."

Housing Works Thrift Shop (306 Columbus Ave., between 74th and 75th sts.; ☎ 212/579-7566; www.housingworks.org/thrift; 1, 2, 3, B, C to 72nd St.; other branches at 143 W. 17th St., 202 E. 77th St., and 157 E. 23rd St.) offers do-gooder shopping: Not only will you find terrific buys on all of the top designers, but part of what you spend will go to help a homeless person living with HIV or AIDS. Along with designers such as Calvin Klein, Perry Ellis, and Diane Von Furstenberg, you'll find wedding gowns and furniture as well (some of which is auctioned in advance on the website for even better savings). I've always had the best luck at the Upper West Side branch, though that could be a fluke.

Ina and Ina Men's ★ (21 Prince St., near Elizabeth St., ☎ 212/334-9048; or 262 Mott St., near Prince, ☎ 212/334-2210; www.inanyc.com; F, V to Houston St. for both) is where the *Sex and the City* costume department resold its clothes once the series ended. Though those costumes are now gone (they sold out in 2 hours flat) there's no other place in the city where you'll be able to achieve "Carrie's" look as affordably, replicating that character's haute but wacky sensibility. The men's store has equivalently daring clothing for men (my recent faves were a leather Calvin Klein shirt for a reasonable $130, and a green alligator jacket for $160).

Not quite as cheap as Encores, **Michael's** (1041 Madison Ave., between 78th and 79th sts.; ☎ 212/737-7273; www.michaelsconsignment.com; 6 to 77th St.) is the only one of the six consignment stores that offers one-of-a-kind couture clothes at deep discounts, including wedding gowns. It also has the largest selection of hats and purses.

WOMEN'S WEAR

Anthropologie ★★ (85 Fifth Ave. and 16th St.; ☎ 212/627-5885; www.anthropologie.com; N, Q, R, 4, 5, 6, L to Union Sq.; also in SoHo, 375 W. Broadway; ☎ 212/343-7070; C to Spring St.) is a large chain of stores that nevertheless manages to give the illusion of being a quirky neighborhood place. You'll find funky, fun clothing here, geared towards trendsetters in their 20s and 30s, along with housewares, shoes, and gifts.

Wispy skirts, beaded tops, sinewy trousers, cropped cashmere sweaters, thin Ts available in every color of the rainbow—all of these goods and more, make up the hippy, chic, Caribbean-happy designs at **Calypso Outlet** ★★★ (405 Broome St., near Lafayette; ☎ 212/343-0450; http://calypso.nwys.com; 6 to Spring St.). Settle for last season's wear (and really, who will know the difference?) and you'll pay as much as 70% less than you will at this pricey chain's other stores.

Though a full-figured buddy of mine complains that the clothing at **Eileen Fisher** ★★ (395 W. Broadway, between Spring and Broome sts., ☎ 212/431-4567; or 521 Madison Ave., between Spring and Broome sts., ☎ 212/759-9888, C to Spring St.; or The Shops at Columbus Circle, ☎ 212/823-9575; or 314 E. 9th St., between First and Second aves., ☎ 212/529-5715; www.eileenfisher.com) has become more form-fitting ever since the designer herself started losing weight, this chain still remains the place to go for elegant, adult clothing in draping, richly colored fabrics that mask those extra inches. And though Fisher doesn't have a

maternity line, I find her clothes to be perfect through month eight, as they often have extra give in the stomach area. Visit the East 9th Street location, which serves as the city's clearinghouse for sale items; or go to the Woodbury Commons outlet (p. 268).

Though you may not have heard of designer Meghan Kinney, she's been a fixture in Manhattan for the past decade thanks to **Meg's** ★ (312 E. 9th St., between Second and First aves.; ☎ 212/260-6329; www.megshops.com; 6 to Astor Place), and has recently opened her own shops in Los Angeles and Toronto. Taking her inspiration from Martha Graham, her designs have a fluidity to them which is quite unique. I also like her use of kicky, unusual fabrics and the fact that though the look is young, it doesn't look foolish on her middle-aged clients. Worth a visit.

"Style is better than trend" is the motto at **Personal Affair** ★ (102 E. 7th St. between First Ave. and Avenue A; ☎ 212/420-7778; www.pa212.com; 6 to Astor Place), and it's a fitting one for this little boutique's expertly cut, smart, frill-free, and reasonably priced clothes. All are designed by Jessica Liepelt, an American living in Germany whose clothes are featured in stores across Europe. This is currently the only outlet in the United States for her wares (there's a small annex on Lafayette St.), but I have no doubt there will be more, as these clothes look great on women of most shapes and sizes.

Hallelujah! **Shen New York** ★★★ (990 Lexington Ave. near 79th St.; ☎ 212/249-2895; 6 to 77th St.; also 311 Columbus Ave., between 74th and 75th sts., ☎ 212/875-0153; 1, 2, 3 to 72nd St.) sells clothes that actually flatter the bodies of middle-aged women. Designer Shen creates garments that are a roomy in the belly area and derriere but never look boxy, in a range of luxurious silks, cottons, and knits. Though these don't come cheap, near-constant sales keep some of the items within affordable reach.

CHILDREN'S CLOTHES

"Can I try this on?" and "Is this one my size?" are the soundtrack when I visit **Daffy's** ★ kids (1311 Broadway at 34th St.; ☎ 212/736-4477; www.daffys.com; N, Q, R, W, B, D, F to Herald Sq./34th St.) with my 3- and 7-year-old daughters. They like the clothes at this off-price specialty clothing chain as much as I do (though I'm not a fan of the adult stuff). Much of it comes from European designers and those American ones with an eye for whimsy—bright, cheerful clothing that's built sturdily and priced reasonably, with jumper dresses (with shirts) coming to just $20 and pairs of shorts at $9.99. Daffy's is part of a small chain in the tri-state area, with six other shops scattered around Manhattan.

Stinky & Minky Vintage Children's Clothes ★★ kids (171 Sullivan St. off Houston; ☎ 212/253-2530; A, B, C, D, E, F to W. 4th St.) may well be the only vintage clothing store in the nation just for kids, but you won't be putting the precious little dears into rompers that someone else has already romped in. Instead, Stinky & Minky's sells "dead stock," clothes that were on sale in department stores between 30 and 40 years ago that simply didn't get bought. The owner, Maruska Saunders, who named the store after her children (their nicknames; she's not that cruel), also creates a line of absolutely precious, and highly durable original clothes that are based on these retro-fashions. I wish she made things in my size, too!

JEWELRY

I'm addicted to **Laila Rowe** ☆☆☆ (8 E. 42nd St. near Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/949-2276; www.lailarowe.com; 4, 5, 6, L to Grand Central Station). For $15 you can complete an outfit with a dangly, chic necklace that looks like it's coral, or shell, or some exotic kind of stone but is really, well, heavy plastic and beads in most cases. Some of the stuff looks cheap, but on others Ms. Rowe does such a good copycatting job that her wares often look like the $1,000-and-up baubles sold by such pricey modern jewelry stores as Fragments. There are also seriously cute earrings (which they'll convert to clip-ons for no extra charge), bracelets, rings, brooches, and bags, all at low prices. Along with the 42nd Street store, there are 13 other branches in all parts of Manhattan.

Though jewelry is rarely cheap, **The Metropolitan Museum of Art** ☆☆☆ (Fifth Ave. between 82nd and 84th sts.; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.; www.metmuseum.org) has a wide assortment of reasonably priced pieces, all knock-offs from the historic jewelry in the museum, ranging from imitation Fabergé earrings to ancient Egyptian and Roman necklaces to Byzantine crosses.

BOOKS, MUSIC & VIDEOS

For those still loyal to vinyl, **Academy LP's** (12 W. 18th St. between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/242-3000; www.academylps.com; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, W, L to Union Sq.) has no peer. It's the largest used-record store in the city, with music in all categories and price ranges (most standard records cost between $5 and $15, but rare LPs will have price-tags in the hundreds of dollars). True fanatics make the pilgrimage out to the "Annex" in Brooklyn (96 N. 6th St.; ☎ 718/218-8200; L to Bedford Ave.), which opened in June of 2005, and houses literally thousands of records. If you don't want to travel, but can't find what you want in Manhattan, clerks will call over to Brooklyn and conduct a search on your behalf.

Both **Barnes & Noble** ☆☆ kids (www.bn.com) and **Borders** ☆☆ kids (www.bordersbooks.com) have dozens of bookstores throughout the city and serve not only as convenient places to purchase books, but as lecture halls, when authors known and unknown come by for book readings and signings several times a week. There are simply too many outlets to list here, but if you go to one of the above sites, you'll find the locations of the store nearest you.

Books of Wonder ☆ kids (18 W. 18th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/989-3270; www.booksofwonder.com; 4, 5, 6, N, R to Union Sq.) is everything a children's bookstore should be: brightly lit, cozy but not cramped, only really crowded during story-telling hours (see website for schedule), and jammed with multiple editions of all those books we loved as kids that we want to introduce to our own children. The oldest and largest children's bookstore in the city, this should also be your first stop if you're seeking out a rare edition of a kid's book, or if you want to purchase art from one of the classics. **Nice perk:** Coupons for discounts on future sales with each purchase.

If you're looking for the CD for that tuneful musical you just saw, **Colony** (1619 Broadway at the corner of 49th St.; ☎ 212/265-2050; www.colonymusic.com; R, Q to 49th or 1 to 50th St.), a musical theater specialist, is the store to patronize. You'll find racks upon racks of classic and contemporary theater music CDs here, plus sheet music, karaoke tracks of current musicals, and a hefty dose of pop music just to keep the kitsch and camp in line. It's open until 1am on most nights.

Every script from every play ever written (well, almost) is available at **The Drama Bookshop** ✯ (250 W. 40th St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/944-0595; www.dramabookshop.com; 1, 2, 3, N, Q, R, S to Times Sq.), an off–Times Square stalwart that has served the theater community of New York for over 40 years. Other offerings run the gamut from fawning biographies to complicated treatises on stage lighting to picture books of Broadway musicals. The Bookshop recently moved to this bright, airy new space, which has a small theater attached; even if you don't want to buy, you can attend a reading absolutely free (see website for schedule).

A counter-culture hotspot, **Mondo Kim's** ✯✯ (6 St. Marks Place, between Second and Third aves.; ☎ 212/598-9985; www.kimsvideo.com; 6 to Astor Place; R, Q to Eighth St.) sells used CDs and vinyl; obscure music videos and films by "auteurs"; and a serious collection of Indie rock at good prices. If you're looking for hard-to-find videos and music, this is the place to try first. Other branches are up near Columbia University (2906 Broadway near 106th St.) and in Greenwich Village (89 Christopher St. between Bleeker and Seventh Ave.).

Whodunnit? Who wrote it? **Murder Ink** (2486 Broadway at 92nd St.; ☎ 212/362-8905; www.murderink.com; 1, 2, 3 to 96th St.) will know the answer to both those questions. This murder-mystery specialist boasts the largest collection of detective novels in New York, including dozens of out-of-print and rare thrillers.

Oscar Wilde Bookstore (15 Christopher St. near Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/255-8097; www.oscarwildebooks.com; 1 to Christopher St.), the world's first gay bookstore, is still going strong after nearly 40 years in business. It remains the friendly, clued-in place it's always been, carrying the most up-to-the-minute gay and lesbian literature, as well as a fine selection of rare and out-of-print books.

Grungy, maddeningly disorganized, stuffy, and crowded, **The Strand** ✯✯✯ (828 Broadway, at 12th St.; ☎ 212/473-1452; www.strandbooks.com; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, W, L to Union Sq.) is nonetheless New York's premier bookstore, a place that rivals the legendary Library at Alexandria in its scope and variety. Its motto is "Eight Miles of Books," and it certainly feels like it has that many when you visit; best of all, many of these are "front list" books that are ordered directly from the publisher at a substantial discount (sometimes as much as 50%). Those looking for rare books should look no further: The Strand has the largest collection in the city, with dozens traded in each day.

I know of no better Times Square time-killer than **Virgin MegaStore** ✯ (1540 Broadway between 45th and 46th sts.; ☎ 212/921-1020; www.virginmegamagazine.com; 1, 2, 3, S, N, R, Q, W to Times Sq.), a buzzing, exciting, music, video, and book store. Six hundred listening stations for CDs from all genres are available for aural browsing, as are 100 viewing stations for previewing DVDs; and you can spend literally an hour here (between a matinee and an evening performance, perhaps?) doing just that. Prices are average, but the selection at this, the largest entertainment store in the world, is extraordinary. Another "mega store" squats on Union Square (52 E. 14th St. on the corner of Broadway; ☎ 212/598-4666; N, Q, R, 4, 5, 6, L to Union Sq.).

COSMETICS & BEAUTY SUPPLIES

The oldest apothecary shop in the nation (it was founded in 1838), **Bigelows** ★★★ (414 Sixth Ave. between Eighth and Ninth sts.; ☎ 212/473-7324; www.bigelowchemist.com; A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.) is still an excellent place to get a prescription filled—they'll even tailor the flavor in liquid medicines if you've got a finicky patient—but in recent years it's become known for its huge range of beauty supplies, carrying some European and Japanese products that aren't available anywhere else in the U.S. Some of the products are quite unusual. There are the "foot petals," which are near-invisible inserts that claim to make even the most fashionable shoes comfortable; "frownies," an 1800s stick-'em-on cure for frown lines that claims to train the wrinkles to go in another direction as you sleep; and house skin products. Even if you don't need to buy, stop by to browse under the Victorian gas chandeliers (converted to electric, but still lovely).

Founded in 1867 as an apothecary shop—its specialty back then was such magic potions as "Money Drawing Oil"—**Kiehls** ★ (109 Third Ave., between 13th and 14th St.; ☎ 212/677-3171; www.kiehls.com; 4, 5, 6, N, R, Q, L to Union Sq.) switched to those modern snake oils, facial creams, and cleansers in the 1960s and has been wildly popular ever since. The best things about shopping here are the historic decor (the original chandeliers are still in use) and the generous gift of numerous small samples with every purchase.

Fifth Avenue is the flagship location for **Ricky's** (509 Fifth Ave. between 42nd and 43rd St.; ☎ 212/949-7230; www.rickys-nyc.com; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central), a punky, funky chain of cosmetics stores that goes beyond the typical drugstore selection of beauty products. Among other items, you'll find wigs, hair dyes for every shade of the rainbow, body glitters, and shampoos even your stylist's never heard of. At Halloween it's the place to shop for a costume, and year-round it's a top location for all your beauty needs—even those you wouldn't tell Mom about. It's also great for souvenirs and small gifts, as it has a number of silly toys and bath products for adults and kids. All in all, there are 16 stores located in all parts of the city.

Ray's Beauty Supply ★★ (721 Eighth Ave. at 45th St.; ☎ 800/253-0993; www.raysbeautysupply; 1, 2, 3, N, R to Times Sq. or A, E, C to 42nd St.) is where New York's actors come to get all their makeup. The variety here is mind-blowing: 32 varieties of false eyelashes, ranging from Liza Minelli spiky to Jennifer Lopez furry; 200 different blushes; countless eye shadows and professional quality brushes; hair dryers; and other beauty gizmos, some of which you might not have even known existed. The prices here are also right, often 40% to 75% less than what you'd find elsewhere (my favorite shampoo sells for $20 at the local salon, so I make the trip to Ray's where I get it for $6).

ELECTRONICS & PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR

For video and still cameras, there's only one place in the city to shop and that's **B&H** ★★ (420 Ninth Ave. between 33rd and 34th sts.; ☎ 800/606-6969 or 212/444-6615; www.bhphotovideo.com; A, E, C to 34th St.), the leader in this field for over 30 years. With an enormous selection, all of it discounted—sometimes by as much as 70%—it stands head and shoulders over every other camera store in town. B&H also barters equipment, meaning that shutterbugs can trade up their own cameras for an advanced model, or buy superb, but less expensive, used

cameras. The only disappointment here is the service, which can be brusque. But if you come in knowing what you're looking for you're sure to get a deal.

Founded in 1971, **J&R Music and Computer World** ★ (15 Park Row between Ann and Beekman sts.; ☎ 212/238-9000; www.jr.com; 2, 3 to Park Place or 4, 5, 6 to Brooklyn Bridge) just keeps growing, and growing, and growing. Now housed in four separate storefronts on Park Row, it offers good prices on factory-fresh DVDs, stereos, computers, palm pilots, fax machines, and other gadgets. Professionally refurbished machines are also good buys here, as they usually come with full warranties.

FURNITURE, COOKWARE, HOUSEWARES & ANTIQUES

A museum. A temple. A sanctuary. I can't afford to buy a darn thing at **ABC Carpet & Home** ★★★ (888 Broadway, between 19th and 20th sts.; ☎ 212/473-3000; www.abchome.com; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, L to Union Sq.), except for spiffy soaps, but I sure do love trolling the floors here, as the goods on offer are simply exquisite. On the first floor, you'll find children's furniture and bedding fit for a Windsor, throw pillows straight from a high-class harem, and all manner of delightful Asian antique furnishings. The second floor is impish, with mod furnishings of the sort Twiggy would love from the '50s and '60s and today. Floor three features the cushiest of duvets, the most satiny of towels, and sheets and other linens. Floors four and five feature antique furnishings, divided up into scruffy-chic country-style furniture on four, and more formal wares above. And the top floor is for carpets, as is the storehouse across the street. An absolute delight (even if you don't buy, you may come away with some good ideas for furnishing your own home). Branches in Brooklyn (20 Jay St.) and the Bronx (1055 Bronx River Ave.) offer periodic sales.

High-quality cookware at serious discounts is the draw at SoHo's **Broadway Panhandler** ★★★ (477 Broome St., corner of Wooster St.; ☎ 866-COOKWARE; www.broadwaypanhandler.com; 1, N, Q, R, or 6 to Canal St.). In business since 1976, it consistently undercuts "suggested retail pricing" on such top brands at Boedum, All Clad, and Emile Henry by a good 40% or more. On a recent visit I found a Le Creuset gratinée dish for just $40; regular retail pricing would have put it out of my range at $90. There are also such unique (and possibly giftworthy) items as silicone glove potholders; aprons in all patterns; silicone "food loops" that you can use to truss and then cook food in; and fancy blown-glass olive oil "drizzlers."

Chefs who like to walk quietly and carry a big knife—such as Nobu Matsuhisa, Daniel Boulud, and all of the blade flingers at Benihana—buy their blades at the low-key **Korin Japanese Trading Corp** ★★ (57 Warren St., between Church and W. Broadway; ☎ 800/262-2172; www.korin.com; A, C, E to Church St., R to Warren St.), in the Financial District. These are samurai-strength knives, and there are dozens of varieties at all price levels, along with affordable cotton kimonos, plateware, and other pieces of Japanalia.

If you're visiting New York; can't shop directly in North Carolina, where most furniture is manufactured and (and thus cheaper); and just have to buy an armchair, dining set, or entertainment center, **North Carolina Furniture Showrooms**

(9 E. 19th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/645-2524 or 800/627-3507; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R to Union Sq.) is where you'll find the best values. The store carries Hooker, Barco Lounger, Sherril Furniture, and other top names, but because you're buying direct from the factory, you'll get these pieces at 50% off retail. Just as they'd do if you lived in NYC, the store can ship your furniture to any area of the country for an amount of money that will not undercut the savings you have on the original price.

A warren of small, collectibles-crammed rooms inhabit four floors in **The Showplace** (40 W. 25th St. between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/633-6063; www.nyshowplace.com; F, V, B to 23rd St.), a Flatiron-district indoor bazaar that has served as home to 74 dealers for the past 10 years. Shops run the gamut from European art ceramics, to classical antiquities from ancient Egypt and Rome, to jewelry and purses, to Japanese woodblock prints and American oil paintings. You won't find much in the way of large furniture here (except when there's an auction on the 4th floor), but you will find everything else antique or vintage. And prices here are lower than you'll find uptown or in the Village at similar stores thanks to the relatively low cost of rent on these booths. Also, the recent demise of a huge nearby flea market has forced dealers to bargain more to stay afloat as they're simply not getting the kind of foot traffic they used to. A fun place to browse; be sure you visit the eccentric "Princess Diana Museum" at gallery 206, and ask owner Herman Morales to tell you the Byzantine tale of how he came by these relics.

GIFTS & PAPER GOODS

Kitsch heaven! Where else but **Alphabets** ★★★ (2284 Broadway, between 82nd and 83rd sts.; ☎ 212/579-5702; www.alphabetsnyc.com; 1 to 79th St.; also at 115 Ave. A between 7th St. and St. Marks Place, and 47 Greenwich Ave. between Perry and Charles sts.) will you find talking Pee Wee Herman dolls, Simpson's chess sets, Curious George T-shirts, and lighters embossed with pictures of the Rat Pack? For those with more "grown-up" sensibilities, Alphabets sells luxurious French soaps, fine wood jewelry boxes, lovely linens, and much more. I dare you to leave the store without buying a gift or a card here for someone (perhaps yourself).

A far, far cry from the sex shops of the Times Square area, **Babeland** ★ (94 Rivington St. near Ludlow; ☎ 212/375-1701; www.babeland.com; F, J, M, Z to Delancey St.; or 43 Mercer St., off Grand St.) is geared towards, well, babes, with a predominantly female staff who explain every dildo, butt plug, and whip in as commonsense and expert a way as if they were selling iPods or cameras. There's a great variety of merchandise—toys, books, videos and various "accoutrements"—with each fetish and predilection covered in a thoroughly unsleazy manner. And if you want to do your part for the environment, here's where you can purchase a solar-powered vibrator.

Who knew that there'd be a market for freeze-dried mice ($49), stuffed piranhas ($24), and pendants made from butterfly wings ($39)? Apparently the mad scientists behind **Evolution Nature Store** ★ kids (120 Spring St.; ☎ 800/952-3195; www.evolutionnyc.com; R, Q to Prince St.) did, and in 1993 they opened this mesmerizing store cum museum, where you can spend an engrossing hour staring at perfectly preserved skeletons (all types of animals), pristine fossils, stuffed creatures, and bugs encased in plastic. A great place to take the kids.

Know anyone who lives in a fantasy world? **Forbidden Planet** ✯ (840 Broadway, at 13th St.; ☎ 212/475-6161; www.fpnyc.com; 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, L to Union Sq.) is where you should buy their gift. The store specializes in all of the "geek" obsessions: sci-fi, horror, Japanese anime, comic books, and fantasy games. There are comics, graphic novels, and sci-fi texts, of course, but also a lot of figurines from such cult classics as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Star Wars;* clothing and costumes on these themes; gaming implements; and more such ephemera.

Silly as it may seem, I always feel my pulse quicken whenever I venture into **Kate's Paperie** ✯✯✯ (140 W. 57th St., between Sixth and Seventh aves.; ☎ 212/459-0700; www.katespaperie.com; N, Q, R, W to 57th St.; also at 8 W. 13th St. between Fifth and Sixth aves.; 561 Broadway, between Prince and Spring sts.; and 1282 Third Ave., at 74th St.), the largest purveyor of exotic papers in the city (the store has over 4,000 different types from 40 countries). While Kate's is not cheap, it carries smaller items—hot wax presses, tiny books, pretty collections of stationery—that are perfect for gifts, and hey, you don't need to travel elsewhere to buy the card!

Pylones ✯ (842 Lexington Ave. at 64th St.; ☎ 212/317-9822; www.pylonesusa.com; 6 to 66th St. Also at 69 Spring St, ☎ 212/431-3244, 6 to Spring St.) is a French company that takes everyday objects—garden tools, ashtrays, luggage tags, wall thermometers—and updates them in Crayola colors and bold patterns. So a pair of pliers ($8) now has a brilliant floral design, luggage tags are shaped like snooty pink poodles ($12), and toasters ($69) are so brightly colored and cute you half expect Ernie and Bert to show up and pop in a slice or two

SPECIALTY FOODS & WINES

There are wine stores with larger selections and more elbow room than **Best Cellars** ✯ (1291 Lexington Ave. at 87th St.; ☎ 212/426-4200; www.bestcellars.com; 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.), but few with the unswerving focus on value that you'll find here. The owners, all longtime wine experts, have made it their mission to find great wines for around $15 or less, and they've stocked the store accordingly. With nightly tastings and an expert staff who are eager to assist even novice wine lovers, you're almost guaranteed to walk out with a great bottle for much less than you'd usually pay.

Since 1925, **Di Palo** ✯✯ (200 Grand St.; ☎ 212/226-1033; 6, N, Q, R to Canal St.; B, D, F to Grand St.) has been fulfilling New Yorkers' needs for everything Italian: sausages, olives, cheeses—all of it the finest quality, imported directly from Italy (except for the scrumptious mozzarella and ricotta, which are made right behind the counter here). Be warned, though: Waits here can be interminable, as the place is extremely popular and the counter staff extremely chatty.

Economy Candy ✯ (108 Rivington St. at Essex St.; ☎ 800/352-4544 or 212/254-1531; www.economycandy.com; F to Delancey St.), an old-fashioned neighborhood candy store, has blossomed in recent years to encompass everything sweet, a few things sour (fine vinegars), and a handful of caffeinated goods (coffees and teas). Opened in 1937, the store is still family-owned and here you'll find the finest halvah (a delicious sesame paste candy) in the city, as well as top-brand imported European chocolates—Feodora, Noir, and others—for half of what you'd pay Uptown. There are also all those great penny candies you haven't seen in years, from wax lips to Pez (in an enormous variety of dispensers) to Mallo Cups, Chocolate Babies, and Black Jack chewing gum.

Another Lower East Side classic, nearly 100 years old, **Gus's Pickles** ★★★ (85–87 Orchard St.; www.gusspickle.com; closed Mon; F to Delancey St.) is the store that was filmed in the romantic comedy *Crossing Delancey.* It looks like it did then, just a guy with a couple of barrels of pickles standing on the street under an awning. And the pickles have not changed in the intervening years either: They're still mouth-puckeringly tart, fizzy with garlic, snappily crisp. If you do decide to buy, a small bucketful can last for up to 1 month unrefrigerated, and 3 months in the refrigerator. Be sure to ask for a taste first: These pickles are totally unlike the bland, mass-produced ones most of us are used to, so you want to get one of appropriate strength (as I said before, they can pack a wallop).

What I like best about **Jacques Torres Chocolate** ★★ kids (350 Hudson St., entrance on King St.; ☎ 212/414-2462; www.jacquestorres.com; 1 to Houston St.)—besides the fact that Jacques Torres is a dashingly handsome Frenchman who likes to cook (making him every woman's dream guy)—is its owner's willingness to blend common ingredients with splendid chocolates. He does this, for example, with two breakfast cereals—plain bran flakes and Cheerios—and the results are exquisite. You'll also want to pick up a can of his extraordinarily rich hot chocolate ($16 for an 18-oz. tin; the "Wicked" version is slightly spicy), which puts Hershey's to shame. Though the shop is a bit out of the way, it's quite fun to visit; the large, oblong room is sided by glass so that you can watch the chocolate being made, and there are even cute child-size tables and chairs for the smallest candy aficionados.

Cheese is the new wine, attracting obsessive devotees who, like oenephiles, can spend hours tasting, musing, comparing. **Murray's Cheeses** ★★★ (254 Bleeker St. between Sixth and Seventh aves.; ☎ 212/243-3289; www.murrayscheeses.com; 1 to Christopher St.) is at the epicenter of this movement. A cavernous emporium with over 250 varieties of cheese from all over the world and multiple tasting stations, Murray's has a fanatical following (in fact, the *New York Times* once ran a story about a lawyer who takes off every Thursday just to work behind the counter there for fun). If you like cheeses, be sure to make your own pilgrimage.

The sharp, smoky smell of fresh roasted coffee will hit you even before you enter **Porto Rico Importing Company** ★★ (201 Bleeker St., between MacDougal St. and Broadway; ☎ 212/477-5421; www.portorico.com; A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.), a century-old beanery. In the hands of the Albanese family all that time, it's been the tradition to only roast as many beans as will be needed for the day's sales, so the coffee you get here is extremely fresh and delicious. This is also a good place to buy fancy teas.

Veniero's ★★ (342 E. 11th St., between First and Second aves.; ☎ 212/674-7070; www.vieniero spastry.com; L to First Ave.) is the best Italian pastry shop in the city, with crisp yet creamy cannolis, buttery pignoli nut cookies, and cheesecakes that are solid but light, and moist but not gooey (in a word: perfect). In a nod to the times, Veniero's now sells carb-free cheesecakes and sugar-free cookies. You can come here and get a box to take home, or lounge at this 100-year-old pasticceria for an espresso and pastry.

A fine New York State wine may sound like a joke, but in the past 15 years winemaking has exploded in the Empire State. There are now 200-plus vineyards, and their surprisingly good wines are available at **Vintage** ★ (482 Broome St., at

A Pilgrimage to Woodbury Common

Just how good is the shopping at **Woodbury Common Premium Outlets** ★★★ (498 Red Apple Court, Central Valley, NY; ☎ 845/928-4000; www.premiumoutlets.com; take I-87 to Harriman, exit 16, or see below for bus directions), a sprawling outlet mall that's an hour outside of New York City? Let me put it this way: I managed to research this entire chapter without spending a cent (though I certainly had to fight some urges). In my one day at Woodbury Common, I frittered away a hefty chunk of my advance for this book.

I couldn't help myself—with over 200 different stores, the temptation simply proved too great. Set on a large campus constructed to look like a small New England town (all two-story white-shingled and brick buildings, with a fake clock tower at its center), Woodbury hosts every single American and European brand of note, from bourgeois retailers such as Gap, Samsonite, Maidenform, Sony, Levis, and OshKosh B'Gosh, to such boutique names as Prada, Escada, Frette linens, Oillily, Kate Spade, and Yves St. Laurent. Better yet, the prices at all of these stores are seriously slashed, with Adrienne Vittadini shells going for as little as $49, DKNY pants for $39, Eileen Fisher sweaters for $49, and elaborate children's flying saucers for $15 (and now you know how I spent my advance). In general, I found prices to be a good 50% below retail, sometimes more.

To get to Woodbury Commons you can either drive, take the train, or ride a bus. I'd recommend the bus: It's cheaper and more direct at just $29 (with the train you'll need to also shell out for a taxi from the station; the bus takes you directly to the mall). Shortline and Gray Line buses leave from the Port Authority approximately every hour, usually about 15 minutes past the hour, and return on an hourly schedule. ***A word of warning:*** Do not buy the discount book from the bus company with your ticket. Those who carry AAA cards can pick them up for free at the Woodbury Common information booth (in the food court). It's also common to see them lying around the bus station at Woodbury, left there by folks who didn't use all the coupons. If you don't belong to AAA, simply go to the Woodbury Common website in advance of your trip and sign up to become a preferred customer. It's free, and you can get the coupons that way. Coupons yield savings of 10% to 15% at most stores in the complex, although occasionally you'll have to purchase over $75 or $100 worth of goods to be eligible for the discount, so crunch the numbers before purchasing the coupons.

Wooster St.; ☎ 212/226-9463; www.vintagenewyork.com; 1, N, Q, R, or 6 to Canal St.; also 2492 Broadway at 96th St.; 1, 2, 3 to 96th St.). Designed to resemble a winery more than a wine store, Vintage boasts a large bar in the back where browsers can sample 200 wines from 60 different vineyards before purchasing. In 2005, Vineyard opened an elegant, adjacent wine bar/restaurant for after-hours tastings.

Crowded at all hours, haphazardly organized, with gruff service, **Zabars** ★★★ (2245 Broadway, at 80th St.; ☎ 800/697-6301 or 212/782-2000; www.zabars.com; 1 to 79th St.) is still the place to come if you want to bring home good old-fashioned deli food. The smoked fish are the finest in the city, the cheese counter boasts 600 pungent varieties, and the halvah is to die for. If you venture up to the second floor, you'll find hundreds of different kitchen gadgets, pots, pans, blenders, and the like.

TOYS

The antithesis of Toys "R" Us, **Kidding Around** ★ Kids (60 W. 15th St., near Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/645-6337; www.kiddingaroundnyc.com; B, D to 14th St.) stays away from all of those annoying beeping, buzzing, and flashing toys. Instead the focus is on playthings that children manipulate themselves, hopefully learning something in the process. Prices are fair, and the shop has a number of unusual toys such as rubber horseshoes ($11, hey you can play in the living room), soap-making kits, and all kinds of dazzling costumes.

You should visit **The American Museum of Natural History** ★★★ (Central Park West, between 79th and 81st sts.; www.amnh.org; B, C to 81st St.) with your kids (they'll love it), and while you're there, buy a few gifts from the museum's extensive and surprisingly reasonable shops (I recently counted almost 20 nice options for less than $3). The toys are mostly science-oriented with a wide variety of choices ranging from miners' helmets with working lights for $10, to stuffed dinosaurs, to puzzles, microscopes, and books.

The Scholastic Store ★★ (545 Broadway, at the corner of Prince St.; ☎ 212/343-6166; http://shop.scholastic.com; R, W to Prince St., 6 to Spring St.) is a warehouse-sized emporium that focuses on toys that are also learning aids—science and craft kits, Leap Frog machines, stacks upon stacks of books, and more. This is also a good place to visit on a rainy day, as the store often hosts storytelling hours, shows, movies, and other events for kids.

More than just a toy store, the huge flagship **Toys "R" Us** (1514 Broadway at 44th St.; ☎ 800/TOYSRUS; www1.toysrus.com; 1, 2, 3, N, Q, R, S to Times Sq.) has become one of Times Square's leading tourist attractions thanks to the three-story-high Ferris wheel at its core. As with other Toys "R" Us branches across the country, you'll find all of the major brands here—Playskool, Lego, Barbie, and others—just in greater numbers than you may find at your home branch. And if you've got an itchy kid, you can take him in, set him up in front of the electronic game station, and take a well-deserved rest for half an hour. ***Warning:*** It can get extremely crowded, so hold on tightly to your child's hand.

10 Nightlife in the "City That Never Sleeps"

From high culture to high jinks

IT ISN'T A BOAST BUT A PLAIN FACT: FROM OPERA TO JAZZ, FROM NIGHTCLUBS to bars and discos, from concert recitals to ballet and modern dance, New York offers the greatest variety and sheer quantity of evening entertainment in America.

Apart from the 200-some-odd theaters presenting dramas and musicals each night (a specialized subject deserving its own treatment; see chapter 10), New York offers every sort of live, nighttime show (including operas, operettas, concerts, and recitals); as well as every kind of dance performance, from classic ballet to experimental movement; and every variety of performance art, from exotic to weird. It has bars by the hundreds, dance clubs designed by world-famous architects, and gay and lesbian hangouts that are openly and unabashedly festive.

> *"Evening is coming fast and the great city is blazing there in your vision in its terrific frontal sweep and curtain of star-flung towers, now sown with the diamond pollen of a million lights, and the sun has set behind them, and the red light of fading day is painted upon the river."*
>
> —Thomas Wolfe

It's a dizzying subject but an important one, because most visitors enjoy New York's nightlife to the same extent they enjoy its daytime sightseeing. And in New York, unlike most other American cities, the sidewalks aren't "rolled up" when darkness descends. In New York (one of the only cities in the country that operates its public transportation throughout the night), the bright lights stay on until 4am and you owe it to yourself to take in all the after-dark excitement.

To make them easy to peruse, I've grouped the nighttime opportunities in this chapter by entertainment category.

OPERA

The big name for opera performances is, of course, the **Metropolitan Opera House** ★★★ (at Lincoln Center, between W. 62nd and 65th sts. off Columbus Ave.; ☎ 212/362-6000; www.metoperafamily.org; 1 to 66th St.). Everything about attending an opera here is grand—from the entrance you'll make past hanging Chagall murals to the world-class singers you'll hear (such as Placido Domingo) to the pomp and glitz of the productions themselves, many designed

by such over-the-top aesthetes as Franco Zefferelli on one end of the scale and Robert Wilson on the other. The lovely little secret about the Met is that the cheap seats get the best sounds. Sit in the theater's ground floor section and you may have trouble making out the words (not good at $175–$320 a seat), but pay as little as $26 for a "family circle" seat, and the voices will float up to you in all their crystalline clarity. Weekday performances can be as much as 50% less expensive, depending on which tier you pick, and standing room drops prices to as little as $15 in the family circle and $20 in the orchestra (they'll even give you your own supertitles box to hold so you can follow the show). ***Warning:*** Don't show up late, unless you want to watch the first act on a video screen in the basement; the Met does not seat latecomers.

The Met's sister company, the **New York City Opera** ★★★ (at Lincoln Center, between W. 62nd and 65th sts. off Columbus Ave.; ☎ 212/362-6000; www.metoperafamily.org; 1 to 66th St.), is a house with a mission. Make that three missions, actually: to champion American singers (Beverly Sills got her start here), to perform contemporary or forgotten operas (though not exclusively), and to serve as the "People's Opera," as former Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia, a founder, put it, by keeping prices reasonable. Now this is opera, of course, so premium orchestra seats won't be cheap, but they top out at $110, which is a third of what you'll

The Season for High Culture

With few exceptions, the great concert halls and opera stages perform between September and June, taking off the summer months. While there are occasional free concerts in Central Park and at other venues, on the whole, lovers of the great musical classics should visit when it's colder.

pay at the Met for similar seats. Oddly, the cheap seats are just $1 less expensive than the Met's. Expect a fine opera experience with a touch, just a touch, less glitz than at the Met.

Your third option is the **Amato Opera Company** ★ (319 Bowery, at 2nd St.; ☎ 212/228-8200; www.amato.org; 6 to Bleeker St.), a mom-and-pop operation that presents postage-stamp versions of the great classics to an adoring audience of regulars. Here, the prices are right at $23 for an orchestra seat, and this being New York, the young singers getting their start here are often terrifically talented.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

More than 100 years ago, Tchaikovsky himself presided over the opening night of **Carnegie Hall** ★★★ (154 W. 57th St., at Seventh Ave.; ☎ 212/247-7800; www.carnegiehall.org; N, Q, R, W to 57th St.), just one of a legion of great musicians who have graced this famous stage. Today, you'll see such stars as Dawn Upshaw, Sophie Van Otter, the Boston Symphony Orchestra (under the direction of James Levine), the Kronos Quartet, and pianist Emanuel Ax—all drawn by the unsurpassed acoustics and the honor of playing this magnificent hall (you can tour it during the daytime; call for info). Ticket prices ricochet up and down, depending on the day of the week, the act and, of course, the theater area in which you choose to sit. For nosebleed seats (and you will be up quite high), prices start at just $26, usually going no higher than $35. Prime seating in the first tier can soar as high as $106, but you'll normally pay between $50 and $70 for a decent seat. In addition to the Isaac Stern Concert Hall (the main auditorium), Carnegie Hall maintains two smaller recital spaces.

Avery Fisher Hall ★★★ (Lincoln Center, between W. 62nd and 65th sts. off Columbus Ave.; ☎ 212/875-1530; www.newyorkphilharmonic.org; 1 to 66th St.) is another superb venue for classical music, as it's the home of the New York Philharmonic, currently under the visionary direction of Lorin Maazel. Along with the classics, the Philharmonic commissions a number of new works each year, and lures star soloists (Midori, Itzak Perlman). Lorin will often share the podium with famous guest conductors from around the world, meaning that an evening here is sure to be an exciting one. A number of concerts feature pre-show talks and meet-the-artist events, and tend to be quite intimate and informative. Tickets range from $23 to $102, with matinees and balcony seats priced at the lower end of the scale. There are also kids' concerts for as little as $7 a ticket. Students are eligible for $10 "student rush" tickets, available online at **www.newyorkphilharmonic.org/studentrush.com** up to 10 days before a concert.

Chamber music is on tap at **Alice Tully Hall** ★★ (Lincoln Center, between W. 62nd and 65th sts. off Columbus Ave.; ☎ 212/875-1530; www.chambermusicsociety.org; 1 to 66th St.), home base for the esteemed Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. A full roster of master classes and lectures add to the performance schedule. National Public Radio listeners will be familiar with this group from their Monday night concert series, broadcast live each week.

Bargemusic ★ (at the Fulton Ferry Landing; ☎ 718/624-2083; www.bargemusic.org; A to High St. or F to York St., both in Brooklyn) is presented on an actual barge moored near the Brooklyn Bridge. This small theater (125 seats) with a big view of the Manhattan skyline is a sheer delight, and a cheap one at that, with tickets topping out at $35. Pianissimos are more piano here and fortissimos molto-loud, even when played by a solo piano or string quartet. This is one of the few truly intimate stages in the city, and the acoustics are first-rate.

DANCE

Ballet aficionados tend to swing between Lincoln Center's two resident companies: **The New York City Ballet** ★★ (☎ 212/870-5570; www.nycballet.com) and **The American Ballet Theater** ★★ (☎ 212/477-3030; www.abt.org). NYCB is the more famous of the two, founded by Lincoln Kerstein and the 20th century's greatest ballet choreographer, George Balanchine. And it is for Balanchine's work that you still attend performances at the New York City Ballet; his ballets are the staple here and remain as diamond-sharp, elegant, and moving as when they were first performed, some as many as 50 years ago. Balanchine's version of *The Nutcracker* is a holiday classic and one of the most difficult tickets to get each Christmas season. ABT features more of an emphasis on story ballets—*Coppelia, Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty*—and tends to produce more bravura stars than NYCB (where the emphasis is on ensemble work). Currently, ABT has a raft of Latino leapers who are thrilling audiences with the artistry and sheer physical prowess of their dancing.

The blockbuster modern dance shows tend to play the **Joyce Theater** ★ (175 Eighth Ave., at 18th St.; ☎ 212/242-0800; www.joyce.org; A, C, E to 15th St. or 1 to 18th St.) and it's not hard to see why: It's simply the best space in the city to see dance—there's not a bad seat in the house. The audience sits slightly above

Practice Makes Perfect

The performing arts are available at a low cost nearly 7 days a week at the **Juilliard School** ★ (☎ 212/799-5000; www.juilliard.edu), the nation's premiere training institution for music, drama, and dance. Performances by supernaturally talented young performers, ranging from chamber music recitals and orchestral concerts to ballets and complete productions of Shakespeare, are open to the public at very reasonable prices (and often free). Because the students perform in different venues around town, it's best to call the box office or consult the Web before attempting to attend a show.

the dancers, meaning that you won't be seeing just the feet, or just the bodies—you'll get the whole picture. In past years, this is where Pilobolus has played, as well as the Parson's Dance Company, Jennifer Muller, and Merce Cunningham. (The Joyce accepts volunteer ushers, so call if you're in search of a freebie—see p. 300 on volunteer ushering). In 2004, the Joyce was chosen to join a celebrated roster of arts organizations that will occupy performance spaces in the new buildings planned for the World Trade Center site.

Hipper and smaller, **Dance Theater Workshop** (219 W. 19th St., between Sixth and Seventh aves.; ☎ 212/691-6500; www.dtw.org; 1 to 18th St.) cocoons its audiences in dance, from the performance clips that often play near the box office, to the "Meet the Artist" programs after shows, to the wine and snack gatherings at the on-site cafe usually attended by the performers after the show. You'll see top talent here, with an emphasis on "flavor-of-the-moment" emerging stars, some of whom have staying power (Bill T. Jones started here, as did David Parsons), and some of whom will ultimately succumb to the unfortunate economics of modern dance (a field in which only a handful of artists are able to make a living).

The Danspace Project (131 E. 10th St., off Second Ave.; ☎ 212/674-8112; www.dancespaceproject.org; 6 to Astore Place or L to Third Ave.) is another top producer of dance, working in one of the loveliest venues in the city: the landmark St. Mark's Church, one of the oldest continuously operating churches in Manhattan and a colonial beauty. Performances are given in the wide open space that is the sanctuary, and the Project is known for the diversity of its offerings: You'll see newcomers in their 20s, mid-career artists, and even dancers and choreographers of AARP age. All present highly polished works with professional production values, though the audience pays much less to see shows here than at other venues: an average of $15.

CONCERT HALLS

Tidy categories won't do for the next three Manhattan venues, which have made a name for themselves by hosting all manner of tony performances. There's **City Center** ★★ (W. 55th St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/581-1212; www.citycenter.org; N, Q, R, W to 57th St.), which is a major dance performance space enjoying regular visits from the Paul Taylor Company, Alvin Ailey, and others; and also the producing organization behind the acclaimed **Encores** ★★ series—staged readings of older, often-forgotten musicals (the Broadway hit revival of *Chicago* began at Encores, as did the recent re-do of Leonard Bernstein's *Wonderful Town*). Every September, the center hosts a dance festival, giving away a number of $10 seats. Farther uptown, **Merkin Concert Hall** ★ (121 W. 67th St., off Broadway; ☎ 212/501-3303; www.kaufman-center.com; 1 to 66th St.) is a friendly stop for world music groups, classic-music ensembles, and Broadway composers trying out new works (in its insider "Bound for Broadway" series). Though the lineup is eclectic, you'll nearly always find something worthwhile at the Merkin. Most diverse is **Symphony Space** ★ (2537 Broadway at 95th St.; ☎ 212/864-5400; www.symphonyspace.org; 1, 2, 3 to 96th St.), which presents programs of music, film, musical theater (the excellent New Voices series of up-and-coming Broadway composers), and the spoken word. It's probably most famous for the last, as the NPR show "Selected Shorts"—short stories read aloud

occasionally by movie stars, always by theatrical figures—is taped here. Every Bloomsday (June 16), Symphony Space hires celebrated actors for a marathon reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses*—an all-day and all-night affair.

All three venues discount student and senior tickets, so inquire about possible savings if you fall into one of those categories. Occasionally, you'll also find City Center offerings on the board at TKTS (p. 299).

Outside of Manhattan, the finest multi-use facility is the **Brooklyn Academy of Music** ✰✰✰ (30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn; ☎ 718/636-4100; www.bam.org; ❷, ❸, ❹, ❺ to Atlantic Ave.), which may well be the best place in the United States for challenging, inventive, and acclaimed international productions of music, dance, performance art, and theater. It's at BAM where you'll see Germany's dance treasure Pina Bausch, the latest theater opus from Brit director Peter Brooks, Phillip Glass's newest symphony, or Baryshnikov's White Oak project in performance.

Along with the large BAM Opera House and the smaller BAM Harvey Theater, the organization has a dedicated movie theater for art films and a cafe space where up-and-coming talent perform. I've never been disappointed by anything I've seen here, though occasionally I've had difficulty getting a seat. It may be the most consistently exciting venue in New York, and the 45-minute-long train ride it takes to get here is well worth the effort. (For those squeamish about the subway, a BAM bus leaves an hour before the performance from in front of the Whitney Altria, on 42nd St. between Fifth and Vanderbilt aves. Bus fare is $4). ***For penny pinchers:*** Discounts are sometimes offered to students and seniors, so inquire when purchasing a ticket.

MUSEUM CRAWLS

In this "city that never sleeps," even the museums sometimes stay up late. Once or twice a week most of the great cultural centers of the city—the Metropolitan, the Museum of Modern Art, the American Folk Art Museum, and others (see below)—keep their doors open until 8 or 9pm and often pair the art-viewing with cocktail service. Though the practice has been going on for years, most residents don't know about these late hours, and the museums tend to get far fewer visitors at these times than during the daytime, which translates into blessedly uncrowded galleries.

See "Museums After Dark," below, for a list of nightowl options.

LIVE-MUSIC CLUBS

FOR JAZZ

Since the late 1920s, when the presences of Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, and W.C. Handy transformed New York into the de facto capital of jazz, stealing that honor from Chicago, the city has been the place where jazz musicians have come to prove their mettle, learn from the greats, and hopefully land a recording contract. It is the only place in the world to have a complete concert facility devoted solely to jazz, the Frederick P. Rose Hall (better known as Jazz at Lincoln Center, see below), but there are also many smaller venues where this all-American art form is alive and kickin'. In fact, certain jazz clubs outdraw the rock-'n'-roll clubs, turning patrons away at the door night after night.

Museums After Dark

Museum	Late Hours	Booze?	Other Comments
American Folk Art Museum (p. 154)	Fri until 7:30pm	Wine, beer, cocktails	Free admission after 5:30pm
Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (p. 152)	Fri until 9pm	No	Check website for exhibit listings as they change frequently
Jewish Museum (p. 166)	Thurs until 8pm	No	
The Metropolitan Museum (p. 140)	Fri–Sat, until 9pm	Beer, wine, cocktails	Roof garden open May–Oct. Otherwise go to balcony bar
Museum of Arts and Design (p. 164)	Thurs until 8pm	No	No admission charged after 6pm
The Museum of Jewish Heritage (p. 158)	Wed until 9pm	No	No admission charged after 4pm
The Museum of Modern Art (p.143)	Fri until 8pm	Beer, wine, cocktails	Free admission after 5pm
The Museum of the Moving Image (p. 160)	Fri until 8pm	No	Visitors attending movie screenings will often stay until 9pm or 10pm in the theater
The Museum of Natural History (p. 142)	Fri until 8:45pm	No	Only the Rose Center is open late; rest of museum closed
The Museum of Sex (p.169)	Sat until 8pm	No	
The Neue Gallery (p. 163)	Fri until 9pm	Beer and wine	Cabaret on-site often goes later
The Rubin Museum (p. 165)	Thurs–Fri, until 9pm	Beer and wine	On-site movie theater often open later
The Whitney Museum (p. 150)	Fri until 9pm	No	Pay-what-you-wish admission after 6pm

My picks for the top jazz venues are:

The Frederick P. Rose Hall ★★★ (**Jazz at Lincoln Center,** in the Time Warner Center, Broadway at 60th St.; ☎ 212/721-6500; www.jazzatlincolncenter.org; 1, A, C, B, D to Columbus Circle; performance schedule varies by the week). You've heard of food courts? This is the "Jazz court," a massive, three-theater facility with a mini-museum on site, that has been wedged into the Uptown corner of the city's premiere mall.

Its centerpiece is the Rose Hall, a concert hall in the round (usually, though it can also be configured as a standard proscenium theater), with remarkable acoustics and a splendidly be-bop look created by huge boxes of light that change color throughout the night—from subtle creams to striking autumn leaf colors—forming a glowing crown around the performance space. Some seats are actually behind the musicians, giving real aficionados a chance to check out the fingering as the musicians perform. This is where Wynton Marsalis, the center's director, struts his stuff in concert with the Lincoln Center Jazz orchestra. Programs here are primarily focused on swing and New Orleans–style jazz. Though the hall can be intimidating, Marsalis does his best to keep the informal jazz vibe, encouraging the audience to clap along and call out; usually by the end of the evening, they're doing just that.

The Allen Room, the center's second largest space, has a configuration that can be switched to accommodate a dance floor, a seven-tier amphitheater, or cocktail-table seating. Whatever the look, it's a splendidly beautiful room with a wall of glass behind the performing space, lending to the music a Central Park backdrop. Dizzy's Club Coca Cola is the most traditional of the theaters, a smaller cocktail and dinner jazz club (again with that transcendent view of Columbus Circle and the park), and the only one of the three facilities to operate year-round, serving as a showcase for some of the younger talents in jazz (called the "upstarts").

After Lincoln Center, **Birdland** ★ (315 W. 44th St., between Eighth and Ninth aves.; ☎ 212/581-3080; www.birdlandjazz.com; daily) is the second-grandest dedicated facility in the city for jazz. The huge, 4,000-square-foot amphitheater has dignified gray carpets covering both the floors and walls, and is decorated throughout with black-and-white pictures of the great jazz performers. Though this is not the original Birdland where Coltrane played, it still presents top acts, with the Duke Ellington Orchestra (now led by his grandson Paul Ellington) playing every Tuesday, and Chico O'Farril's Afro-Cuban Jazz Big Band owning Monday. In fact, if your idea of jazz is a small battalion of men blowing horns, this is where to come, as the large space is able to accommodate big bands that other venues (other than the concert halls around town) simply can't fit. Cover charges range from $20 to $50, but seem to hold steady at $40 on weekends, $25 on weeknights; if you sit at the bar rather than at the tables, you get one drink free and escape an additional $10 food or drink minimum.

Iridium (1650 Broadway at 51st St.; ☎ 212/582-2121; www.iridiumjazzclub.com; N, Q, R to 49th St.; daily) tends to attract a slightly older crowd, drawn by earlier shows (the first performance of the night is at 8pm rather than 9), better-quality food than at most clubs, and a more intimate setting that allows patrons to get up close and personal with the performers. I think they probably like, as I do, the updated 1950s decor, with little shaded lamps on each table, and "hep" brown-and-maroon patterned panels on the walls. Monday night the

legendary Les Paul does two sets ($37 cover); Tuesdays and Wednesdays are given over to the music of Mingus and Zappa ($20 cover); on other nights, a wide range of acts averages $30 for the cover and $10 for either food or drink.

The Village Vanguard ✯✯✯ (178 Seventh Ave., between Perry St. and W. 11th St.; ☎ 212/255-4037; www.villagevanguard.com; 1, 2, 3 to 14th St.) turned 70 years old in 2005, but still has the youngest spirit of any of the jazz clubs in town, consistently featuring the best of the new talents and cutting-edge jazz. It also looks the most like a jazz club *should* look, to my mind. You enter a red door and descend a steep staircase to a battered, triangular room, cluttered with posters and pictures of all the greats who played and recorded albums here (Mingus, Davis, Monk, Marsalis). The club has also showcased folkies such as Pete Seeger and Harry Belafonte over the years, but today it's strictly jazz and its prices are among the most reasonable: $30 cover on weekends, which comes with drink tickets good for one of whatever you want. Weeknight shows are even cheaper (they vary in price).

> *"New York seems conducted by jazz, animated by it. It is essentially a city of rhythm."*
>
> —Anaïs Nin

The Blue Note (131 W. 3rd St., off Sullivan St.; ☎ 212/475-8592; www.bluenotejazz.com; A, C, E, B, D, F to W. 4th St.) has the most corporate feel of all the clubs (perhaps because it's now a chain, with four clubs in Japan and one in Italy). Tables are jammed together, the bar area is even more crowded, and the second floor is given over to a huge souvenir stand of such kitschy items as jazz golf balls, teddy bears, and bobble-head figurines of musicians. But the Blue Note still attracts some of the best talent in the city, so it can't be overlooked, and it does have a terrific late-night series for newcomers (just an $8 cover). Its prices are a bit lower than those at the other clubs as well, with many shows coming in at just $25 (even on the weekends), just $15 at the bar (though I'd recommend avoiding the bar at all costs; you're too far from the music here and the atmosphere is like Grand Central Station at rush hour).

FOR CABARET

In the twilight world between jazz clubs and Broadway shows are cabaret theaters, small stages where the crooner is still king, three encores is the norm, and prices can rival those of the most expensive Broadway shows . . . with a two-drink minimum thrown in, to boot.

The classic cabarets of New York, those that attract such big names (for this small field) as Elaine Stritch, Andrea Marcovicci, Eartha Kitt, and Michael Feinstein, can be counted on one hand. They are:

- **Café Carlyle** ✯✯✯ (35 E. 76th St. at Madison Ave.; ☎ 212/724-1600; www.thecarlyle.com; 6 to 77th St.)
- **Feinstein's at the Regency** ✯✯ (540 Park Ave. at 62nd St.; ☎ 212/339-4095; www.feinsteinsattheregency.com; N, R to Fifth Ave.)
- **The Algonquin** ✯✯ (59 W. 44th St. between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/840-6800; www.algonquinhotel.com; 1, 2, 3, S, N, Q, R, W to Times Sq.)

All three are elegant, acoustically blessed spots; which club you pick will depend on who's headlining and how plush you're feeling, as cover charges will run between $50 and $95 per person, plus a food or drink minimum.

But there's another handful of places that play host to a mix of talents, generally charging half to one-third of what the snooty three charge. Of these, here are the ones I like.

A cabaret stalwart, **Danny's Skylight Room** (346 W. 46th St., between Eighth and Ninth aves.; ☎ 212/265-8130; www.dannysgrandseapalace.com; C, E to 50th St.) is incongruously housed in the back of a Thai restaurant. With a heaping helping of *pad Prik,* you'll hear Gershwin, Berlin, and Boubil from the mouths of the pixie-ish Blossom Dearie, singer-songwriter-pianist (and NYC fave) John Wallowitch, and Annie Ross. Danny's often favors the jazz side of the cabaret spectrum. Covers range from $8 to $25. Located in the heart of the Theater District.

Broadway babies, in between Great White Way gigs, tend to play **Don't Tell Mama**'s (343 W. 46th St., between Broadway and Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/757-0788; www.donttellmama.com; R, Q, C, E to 50th St.) in the hopes of attracting agents and snaring jobs. So what you see can be a mixed bag of audition songs, confessionary patter, drag shows, and sometimes moments of unadulterated genius. Because very few of the people who play here will have names you recognize, it's a bit of a gamble, though the talent in the front room tends to be a bit more polished than those who play in the back. Broadway insider Seth Rudetsky has a regular gossipy, catty show that's always worth the price of admission (which can be $12–$15, depending on the act and night).

Wrongly named, **The Duplex** ✰ (61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave.; ☎ 212/455-5438; www.theduplex.com; 1 to Christopher St.) is actually a triplex, with one floor devoted to piano bar shenanigans (performed by a changing cast of singers, pianists, and singing bartenders), the top floor to traditional cabaret, and the one in between called the "game room"—a lounge-type place with lots of TVs, low couches, and hot bartenders. A cover charge applies only in the cabaret room, with prices averaging between $10 and $20 (plus a two-drink minimum), though the cover can go as high as $40 for headliners. The gayest of the three options—after all, it *is* in the Village—it's a fairly low-key place of just 75 seats with a stellar history, having witnessed the debuts of Barbra Streisand, Joanne Worley, and KT Sullivan. Maybe you'll see a rising star on your own visit.

FOR BLUES, COUNTRY & ROCK

If you're in town to see one of the mega-concerts, you probably already know to go to Radio City Music Hall (www.radiocity.com), Madison Square Garden (www.madisonsquarden.com), or nearby Jones Beach (www.jonesbeach.com). Listed below are the city's more intimate, interesting music venues.

Is there a more resonant place in all of Manhattan to listen to blues, jazz, or pop music than the legendary **Apollo Theater** ✰✰✰ (253 W. 125th St. between Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Frederick Douglass blvds.; ☎ 212/531-5300; www.apollotheater.com; A, B, C, D to 125th St.)? To me, it's a thrill just to walk past the collage of all of the greats who've played here and then take a seat in this lovely, surprisingly intimate theater (it looks much bigger on TV). All sorts of celebs still play here, from Baby Face to Bill Cosby, but Amateur Night on Wednesday

remains the headline attraction, a gladiatorial music demonstration where the winners may emerge stars and the losers are skewered with the unkindest of boos and shouted insults. To learn more about the history of the Apollo, go to p. 79.

Head from the top of Manhattan to its toe. The longest-running music club on the Lower East Side—the Strokes were discovered here—**Arlene's Grocery** ★ (95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard sts.; ☎ 212/995-1652; www.arlenesgrocery.com; F, V to Second Ave.) is more than a decade old now but still going strong. From the outside it looks like a typical neighborhood *bodega* (hence the name), but inside you aren't going to find any groceries. Instead, there's a spacious bar with cozy seating nooks towards the back; and a lower-level club, with a big seatless pit for the audience, sided by a few tables and chairs. Grungy, loud, and dark, it's the epitome of a rock club, and rock is what you'll get here, usually five or six acts per night for a flat $7 cover, no drink minimum. Monday nights, quiet at most clubs, are raucous here, thanks to a weekly "Rock and Roll Karaoke" session, complete with live back-up band.

B.B. King Blues Club and Grill (237 W. 42nd St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/997-4144; www.bbkingblues.com; 1, 2, 3, N, Q, R, S to Times Sq.) is the "Branson" of NY's music clubs, a place where you can go and see the somewhat faded stars of rock, pop and blues—Little Richard, Pat Benatar, Crystal Gayle—in a dignified, comfortable red-velvet curtain-type place that's large enough to accommodate all of the fans these former luminaries still have (the house seats 500). Entrance fees vary by show, as do cover charges, but my advice is to drink any cover there may be rather than eat it, as the food is highly processed and overpriced.

With a landmark Art Deco interior, **The Beacon Theater** ★ (2124 Broadway, between 74th and 75th sts.; ☎ 212/496-7070; www.beacontheater.com; 1, 2, 3 to 72nd St.) has to be one of the loveliest venues in the city in which to rock out. And they really knew how to build theaters back in the 1920s: Every seat has a good view, and the acoustics are remarkable. Which may be why this is such a favorite of the touring bands who make this their New York home. While you won't get the mega-names, you will see talented stars either on the way up or down, names such as ZZ Top, Willie Nelson, Bonnie Raitt, Clay Aiken, and Journey. Prices vary widely by show and seat, but often start around $25.

Bob Dylan, Linda Ronstadt, Arlo Guthrie, Melissa Manchester . . . all of the big names of the '60s and '70s played **The Bitter End** (147 Bleeker St. between Thompson St. and LaGuardia Place; ☎ 212/673-7030; www.bitterend.com; A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.), and the club still has the posters to prove it, so old they can't really be called "yellowing," they're now a permanent deep woodsy brown. This is no nostalgia club, though: The Bitter End continues to act as a try-out house for new singer-songwriter types (primarily), many of whom are quite talented. I saw a terrific vibraphone and guitar duo, odd as that may sound, the last time I was here. An average cover of just $5, perfect acoustics, and abundant if somewhat cramped seating, makes for a much more pleasant music experience than at many of the other clubs in the vicinity.

Co-owned by Chris Noth, "Mr. Big" on *Sex and the City* and currently on *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* (that's him in the large photo over the entrance to the music room), **The Cutting Room** ★★ (19 W. 24th St. between Fifth and Sixth

aves.; ☎ 212/691-1900; www.cuttingroomnyc.com; N, R to 23rd St.) has a soothing retro vibe, with brass chandeliers for lighting, heavy red velvet drapes to cut down on the noise, and wise-cracking, glamorous female bartenders presiding over the long mahogany bar at the side of the front room. The lineup in the back room is just as classy, consisting usually of accomplished, mid-career, or up-and-coming rock, blues, and jazz musicians of all stripes. The only disappointment here is the poorly produced burlesque shows on Saturday nights (try the Slipper Room instead; see below).

A New York institution known for presenting experimental, edgy alternative rock and jazz from such iconoclasts as John Zorn and Non Phixion, **The Knitting Factory** (74 Leonard St. between Church St. and Broadway; ☎ 212/219-3006; www.knittingfactory.com; 1 to Franklin) is actually three concert venues and a bar in one. The main floor houses the biggest stage and hosts the most established names, the second level is for the up-and-comers, and the basement is for newbies (but usually darn talented ones). Covers vary widely, and bouncers check IDs before you enter, stamping those allowed to drink (meaning this is a club you could potentially take a teen to, just to listen to the music).

You visit **Mercury Lounge** ★ (217 E. Houston St., between Essex and Ludlow sts.; ☎ 212/260-4700; www.mercuryloungenyc.com; F, V to Second Ave.) because of the talent of its booker: If there's a band playing in and around New York City that's on the edge of hitting it big, you're going to hear them here. It's just a shame that the room they have to play in isn't more comfortable. With very few seating options and no proper bar (you have to go back into the front room or ask the waitress posted in the corner for a plastic cup of $4 beer), it's not a great place to hang out. Still, if the music's your main priority, this is the place to hit.

Pianos ★★ (158 Ludlow St., at Stanton; ☎ 212/505-3733; http://pianosnyc.com; F, V to Second Ave.) is a hopping bi-level music club that really has it all. It takes its name from the former piano store that stood on this site, and it must have been a nice-looking place because the club has wide-boarded wooden floors, a pressed-tin ceiling, and an airy feel to it that's unusual for the Lower East Side. The first floor has a hopping bar up front, with luscious cocktails and good vintage wines; also on this floor is a large music club. Upstairs is a spacious lounge, with a number of comfortable couches where you can curl up after you've had your fill of music. Every Sunday, the stage is turned into a comedy club for a free—and very good—show from The Whitest Kids U Know.

For country, rockabilly, and even New Orleans–style jazz, **Rodeo Bar** ★ (375 Third Ave. at 27th St.; ☎ 212/683-6500; www.rodeobar.com; 6 to 28th St.) gives the best imitation of a roadhouse in New York City, rustling up bands with names like "The Ranchhands," "Angry John and the Killbillies," and "Jackalope Junction" for live music shows 7 nights a week (10pm Sun–Thurs, 11pm weekends). There's never a cover charge, and they don't even seem to have a system in place to make sure you buy a drink, probably because you'll feel kinda silly hanging out in a room with peanut shells all over the floor and a converted horse trailer for a bar, without a cold one in your mitt. Patrons who pony up for a Tex-Mex meal get a seat right in front of the band, but even if you're just drinking, you can usually see the show from the bar stools in the back (it's also broadcast on TVs around the room).

FOR WORLD MUSIC

My favorite among New York's many music clubs has to be **S.O.B.'s** ★★★ (204 Varick St. at W. Houston; ☎ 212/243-4940; www.sobs.com; 1 to Houston St.), the single most joyous place you can visit between the hours of 8pm and 2am. A large club decorated with fake palm trees and giant parrots, it specializes in the music that you'd find in the places where, well, you'd find parrots and palm trees: India (great *bangra* or Indian pop music parties), the Dominican Republic, Trinidad, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Brazil. Its "Samba Saturdays" are the longest-running party in New York, featuring throbbing music and a bravura stage show of samba dancing and *capoeira* (a dancelike Brazilian martial art). If you arrive before 8pm on Saturday and order dinner, the $20 cover is waived. Other days of the week, the cover ranges from $10 to $20.

FOR BURLESQUE

Good ol' striptease is making a comeback at **The Slipper Room** ★ (167 Orchard St. at the corner of Stanton St.; ☎ 212/253-7246; www.slipperroom.com; F, V to Second Ave.), the only true burlesque theater left in Manhattan. It features a lineup of drag comedians, monologists, and ecdysiasts of all shapes, sizes, and genders (when I was last there a zaftig brunette stripped down to pasties and a g-string while dancing with a hula-hoop; and a man dressed as Bacchus had two women suction up wine through straws from the plastic bag that covered his genitals, until—*Tah dah!*— all was revealed). The theater, actually a one-room bar, features a small stage at the back, and can get extremely crowded. You'll want to get here about an hour before the show (there are often go-go dancers at that time for entertainment) so that you can snag one of the few seats on the side of the room. Entrance is a mere $5 to $8 most nights, and there is no drink minimum.

FOR ALL OF THAT & EVERYTHING ELSE . . .

Two downtown venues make the grade for inclusion in this book. The more established is **Joe's Pub** ★★★ (425 Lafayette St. near Astor Place; ☎ 212/239-6200; www.joespub.com; 6 to Astor Place), housed in the Public Theater, which itself is housed in the former Astor Library (1st public library in the city), a majestic neo-Romanesque room, with a soaring ceiling, fluted columns, red velvet curtains, and plush banquettes—one of the most elegant, interesting-looking clubs in the city. You never know who you're going to see perform here. The roster can range from top-Broadway stars trying out their cabaret acts, to World Music phenoms, to jazz, to poetry evenings, to Lesley *(It's My Party)* Gore coming out of the closet. The acts are always of a high level, the atmosphere unceasingly celebratory. I recommend calling ahead for a table reservation (otherwise you'll be stuck in the back at the bar). Dinner is available at all three shows each evening. Youngsters under the age of 18 can attend shows that start before 11pm.

Joe's is now getting some serious competition from Mo's, **Mo Pitkins House of Satisfaction** ★ (34 Avenue A between 2nd and 3rd sts.; ☎ 212/777-5660; www.mopitkins.com; F, V to Second Ave.)—that is. Opened in 2005, Mo's is a purposefully hokey-looking place with a faux diner downstairs serving "Judeo Latino food" (potato latkes and matzoh ball soups followed by chorizo sausages and beans and rice) and a 65-seat cabaret space above that plays host to one of the

most eclectic rosters of talent in the city. The night I last visited, the draw was a punk klezmer band followed by one of the city's best-known drag comedians. On other nights you'll see down-and-dirty rock bands at 11pm, following short-story readings at 9pm. The concept is all over the place, but somehow it works: There's a line out the door (often) for the cabaret theater, the restaurant is reservations-only, and the bar is packed.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here's a little secret: Because it's so insanely difficult to make a living as a comedian, most play multiple gigs at multiple clubs in the course of an evening just to make ends meet. So the funny fellow you're seeing at the 9pm show at some no-name club may be the 11pm headliner at a club with lines out the door. Therefore, if a hawker shouts out the words, "Do you like comedy?" to you in Times Square or near Astor Place (in the Village), you may want to answer, "Yes!" and snag one of the free or discounted passes he's handing out, even if you've never heard of the club. Most likely you'll have an enjoyable evening. Just be aware that the show won't be entirely free, as you'll have to pay a drink minimum, usually two per show, and sometimes a partial cover. Crunch the numbers before you show up at a club.

Of course, you can't guarantee you'll stumble upon one of these hawkers, so I've listed below my picks for guaranteed giggles:

STAND UP

When Jerry Seinfeld, Robin Williams, Dave Chapelle, and Ray Romano (and other equally famous, New York-based comedians) decide to "try out" material in front of an audience, they usually drop by the **Comedy Cellar** ★ (117 MacDougal St. near Minetta St.; ☎ 212/254-3480; www.comedycellar.com; Ⓐ, Ⓔ, Ⓒ, Ⓑ, Ⓓ, Ⓕ to W. 4th St.), a basement room in the Village that crams in crowds seven nights a week. On nights when these "biggies" don't make an appearance (and their sets are never advertised in advance), newer headliners—comedians with Comedy Central credits and HBO specials—take the stage. Unlike other clubs, which will create a lineup around just one of these rising stars, the Cellar always has three or more populating its hour-and-a-half shows (at 9 and 11pm). Cover charges are $10 on weeknights and $15 on weekends, but if you go to the club's website a few days in advance, the club will reward you with a code that waives the cover (though not the two-drink minimum).

More comedy for the cash is what's on offer for those who visit the **Comic Strip Live** ★ (1568 Second Ave., between 81st and 82nd; ☎ 212/861-9386; www.comicstriplive.com; ❹, ❺, ❻ to 86th St.) on a weeknight. Instead of holding one set and then clearing the house for the next, the lineup starts at 8:30pm and goes on until—well, who knows when. That may be why the cover is a bit higher than the competition's: You'll pay $14 on weekdays and $19 on the weekend, plus a $12 drink minimum. But you could theoretically laugh it up here for 4 or 5 hours on that tab. Like the other clubs, the Comic Strip attracts the top performers you'll see slinging jokes on Letterman, Conan, and Leno. And on weeknights, some of the "graduates" of the place who got their start here—Chris Rock, Paul Reiser, Wanda Sykes, and others—drop in, unannounced, for a set. ***Savings tip:***

The Comic Strip often sells discounted tickets on the street in Times Square, so look for its reps when you're there.

Gotham Comedy Club ✯ (W. 22nd St., between Fifth and Sixth aves.; ☎ 212/367-9000; www.gothamcomedyclub.com; Ⓑ, Ⓕ to 23rd St.) is the most civilized comedy club in town (though I won't vouch for what's going to come out of some raunchy jester's mouth). No, by civilized I mean the room which, while not large, packs fewer guests to a table, and doesn't seat anyone with their back to the stage (a problem at the Comedy Cellar). Moreover, instead of having to wait 10 or 15 minutes on the sidewalk outside the club before shows (in all kinds of weather), patrons belly up to the spacious bar in the front room before and after the shows (don't imbibe too much, though: A two-drink minimum is strictly enforced). The club often serves as an audition place for the bookers who pick acts for the Letterman show, Conan O'Brien, and others, and if you hit it on these nights the atmosphere can be electric. Cover charges here are $10 weeknights, $16 on weekends.

IMPROV

In 1996, four "missionaries" of improv comedy came to New York from Chicago and founded the **Upright Citizens Brigade Theater** ✯✯ (307 W. 26th St., right off Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/366-9176; www.ucbtheater.com). Dedicated to the art of "long form improvisation," in which performers riff on one or two subjects for up to half an hour, the troupe's appreciation for the absurd, along with their smart, fearless performing style, quickly made them a hit among jaded young New Yorkers. Today, Amy Poehler, one of the Citizens, is a star of *Saturday Night Live;* Comedy Central created an "Upright Citizens Brigade" TV show; and the theater itself has become the hippest place in the city to laugh loud and long. Poehler still performs here, and she regularly brings to the stage other SNL stars (I caught Seth Myers the last time I went), as well as writers and staff from the *Conan O'Brien Show* and the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart.* The somewhat grungy basement theater offers shows seven days a week, sometimes twice or three times a night, at the slacker-friendly price of $8 or less (and about two or three shows a week are free).

BARS & LOUNGES

A note before you plunge in: In the first half of this discussion, I cover bars where *generally* dancing does not occur, with dance clubs listed at the end. However, some bars do have two faces, so if you're looking for a more laid-back scene in which to drink and then, perhaps, shake your groove thing, skim through this bar section first.

CHINATOWN

Down an unmarked stairway on a quiet street, **Double Happiness** ✯✯ (174 Mott St.; ☎ 212/941-1282; beers $5, specialty drinks $9–$10; Sun–Thurs 6pm–3am, Fri–Sat until 4am) is one of New York's secret hideaways, a former speakeasy with low ceilings, even lower lighting, and a space that twists and turns into a dozen intimate nooks (if you can, snag a seat in the tiny room behind the beaded curtain and under the skylight). Though the crowd is more SoHo than Shanghai, the owners give a nod to the area, with a decor that spotlights a few local artifacts (Chinese passports from the '20s, packs of Asian playing cards), and a bar menu built around green tea and lychee martinis. A sexy, fun spot to imbibe.

LOWER EAST SIDE

Relaxed, not too loud, not too expensive—is there anything not to like about **Belly** ★ (155 Rivington St., between Clinton and Suffolk sts.; ☎ 212/533-1810; F to Delancey St.; Sun–Thurs 5pm–2am, Fri–Sat 5pm–4am)? I haven't found a fault yet; in fact, this has to be one of the most chill bars in town, with a better-than-usual wine selection, a full range of sakes, fun bar snacks (including chunks of Toblerone chocolates, yum!), a sophisticated all-red decor, and a hip but not aloof crowd. On Monday night, happy hour extends the entire night, with all drinks just $3.

Happy Ending ★★ (302 Broome St. between Eldridge and Forsythe sts.; ☎ 212/334-9676; B, D to Grand St.; daily 7pm–4am). At this former "massage parlor" named the XIE Health Club (the original awning is still up), you party downstairs in the white tiled rooms where the, er, "happy endings" once took place. Upstairs is an elegant, red-lit bar with a rotating abstract art display at the front. Because the bar has a number of large booths, it gets lots of groups on Friday and Saturday nights. Tuesday is hard-core punk night, and Thursday sees a mix of gay men on the first floor and Goths in the basement.

SOHO

Vodka is Czar at **Pravda** ★★ (281 Lafayette St. between Houston and Prince sts.; ☎ 212/226-4944; B, D, F, V to Broadway-Lafayette), a Russian-themed basement lounge that serves 21 different brands from all parts of the potato-distilling world: Moldova, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Finland, Denmark and, of course, Russia. You sling them back in a curved-ceiling cellar alongside Cyrillic signs posted on the walls, and surrounded by chic SoHo types lounging in armchairs and plush circular leather booths. Upstairs is a smaller bar area where things get even more USSR-era: everyone smokes up here, damn the law.

EAST VILLAGE

Latin-style romance is on tap at **Baraza** ★ (133 Avenue C between 8th and 9th sts.; ☎ 212/539-0811; L to First Ave.), an Alphabet City standout with a bar menu heavy on the mojitos and caparinhas, all set against a soundtrack of salsa, samba, and African beats (a different genre of music is featured each night). An entire wall is decorated with Goya labels. The only "un-Latin" element is the crowd, composed of the usual East Village hipsters, but somehow those who come here all know how to dance, and a lot of fancy footwork takes place in the small back area behind the bar.

Decibel ★★ (240 E. 9th St. between Third and Second aves.; ☎ 212/979-2733; 6 to Astor Place) is a gritty, underground sake bar that's become a center of social life for many of the ex-pat Japanese living in New York City. In fact, most of the clientele are Japanese, the soundtrack is Japanese rock, and the bar food can be exotic (dried squid, anyone?). But all are welcome here, and if you feel a bit out of place when you enter this Tokyo transplant, you'll relax once you tuck into any of the 30-odd sakes on offer here each evening. A real experience.

If you're a man's man (which I'm obviously not), you'll like **McSorely's Old Ale House** (15 E. 7th St., between Bowery and Second Ave.; ☎ 212/473-9318; 6 to Astor Place), New York's oldest continuously operating pub (est. 1854), and one that famously kept out women until a lawsuit in 1970 ended the bigotry (it was a

landmark case that ultimately outlawed discrimination in all public places in the city). With sawdust on the rough wooden floor; yellowing photos and newspaper clips chronicling all of the famous people who got smashed here (Abraham Lincoln was one of them); and a jumble of relics in every nook and cranny (the handcuffs hanging from the ceiling once belonged to Houdini, the turkey bones hanging off the chandelier were hung there by soldiers having a last meal before shipping off to World War I); it's an evocative place to hang out . . . if you're smart enough to visit before 4pm in the afternoon. After that point it gets ugly—kind of like the frat parties I pretended to like in college—with out-of-towners jammed together tighter than in a rush-hour train, swilling so-so ale, and shouting over the din.

Ignore the views of the New York cityscape from the large plate-glass windows at **Zum Schneider** (107 Avenue C at 7th St.; ☎ 212/598-1098; www.zumschneider.com; L to First Ave.) and you could be in a beer hall off some gritty side street in Munich. The beers pack as much of a punch (be careful, unusual German beers such as Kolsch have a higher alcohol content than you may be used to), the bratwurst has that same snap, and if you stick around long enough—till, say, 2 or 3am—revelers here are likely to hop on top of the benches and boogie, just like they do across the pond when things get going. It's a fun, loud place with dozens of beers, a rock and hip-hop soundtrack, and a party spirit. Did you ever think you'd be going to a genuine German beer garden when you booked your NYC vacation?

GREENWICH VILLAGE

The unmarked door at **Chumley's** ★ (86 Bedford St., between Grove and Barrow sts.; ☎ 212/675-4449; Sun–Thurs 5pm–midnight, Fri–Sat noon–2am), a former speakeasy (look for the trap doors in the floor in front of the bar), can be difficult to find. But it's worth the search just for the ghosts you'll meet here—this is where the literati of the city hung out and Chumley's has the framed photos to prove it, everyone from Hemingway to Steinbeck to Calvin Trillin. In fact, the walls are plastered with memorabilia, from portraits of local firemen (in the back) to the jacket covers of books written by former patrons. The crowd is now more yuppies than novelists, but it's still a delight to plop down in front of the fireplace with a frosty mug and the faces of your heroes gazing down upon you.

Employees Only ★★ (510 Hudson near Christopher St.; ☎ 212/242-3021; 1 to Christopher St.) is the place to come if you take your cocktails seriously. A crack staff of veteran bartenders from some of the top restaurants in town man the place, squeezing their own juices daily and infusing liquors with interesting additions, such as lavender (in the gin) and herbes de Provence (in the vermouth), which they then mix into some of the most bizarre but delicious drinks in town. Upping the festivity factor is a psychic who does readings for $15 a pop, and a cute garden out back for those sultry summer nights.

And **The Other Room** ★ (143 Perry St. between Greenwich and Washington sts.; ☎ 212/645-9758; Sun–Mon 5pm–2am, Tues–Thurs 5pm–3am, Fri–Sat 5pm–4am; cash only; 1 to Christopher St.) is the place to come if you take your wine and beer seriously. There's no hard stuff served, but you will find an abundance of unusual ales, beers, and wines. The bar itself is sleek and simple, with a good amount of art dotted about, and a local crowd of Villagers both gay and straight. A low-key, friendly bar, the place focuses on conversation and good brew (or vino).

Cocktails Alfresco

For a buzz with a breeze, try one of the following outdoor hotspots (open roughly Apr–Oct):

The Frying Pan ★★★ (Pier 63 off the West Side Hwy., around 24th St.; A, E, C to 23rd St.; ☎ 212/989-6363; call for hours as they vary by week). There are few better ways to spend a summer evening than on this simple, rustic pier, which has a cheap bar and grill for drinks and burgers, and great views of the cruise ships moored nearby and the Jersey skyline. *The Frying Pan,* a salvaged lighthouse ship (it was submerged from the mid-'60s to the '80s), is a rusting, fascinating hulk of history that you can tour at no cost, and with a brew in hand, if you like.

The Garden at Ono ★ (18 Ninth Ave., though the entrance is on Hudson St. between Gansevoort and W. 13th sts.; ☎ 212/660-6766; A, E, C to 23rd or L to Eighth Ave.). Call first for a "bar reservation" (yes, there is such a thing) so that you won't get stuck behind the velvet rope, and then swing by this chichi Meat-Packing District sushi-and-cocktails scene, which is a favorite of New York's trendmakers: mostly fashion designers, actors and media-types. In the center of the space is an ancient reassembled Japanese barge; covering it is a retractable roof, making it one of the few outdoor spaces where you can party even in the rain.

Luna Park (In Union Square Park, at around 17th St.; ☎ 212/475-8464; usually open May–Sept; N, R, Q, 4, 5, 6, L to Union Sq.). Young office workers from the neighborhood and model-types from nearby agencies mingle at this friendly restaurant/bar, located right between two playgrounds (making it a good spot for parents to grab a cocktail while they watch the kids). Boppy music and solicitous service complete the scene.

The Yard (310 W. Broadway, between Grand and Canal sts.; ☎ 212/965-3000; A, C, E to Canal St.; open 4pm weekdays, noon on weekends; open Memorial Day–Sept). In the suburbs, lawns are no big deal, but in the Big Apple you need a reservation to hang out on one. Or at least that's the case at The Yard, an ultra-hip summer space on the side of the Soho Grand Hotel. One half is paved and strung with carnival lights, the other half (in the back) is a lawn with size 2's reclining on teak beach lounges, $12 frozen margaritas in hand.

The Boat Basin Café ★★ (79th St. below the West Side Hwy.; ☎ 212/496-5542; www.boatbasincafe.com; mid-Apr to Oct). Follow the signs through Riverside Park and down the steps to this under-the-highway cafe, where a refreshing mix of young singles, couples with babies, and seniors, if you can believe it, all hang together to enjoy stunning river views. Though you'll have to buy a full meal to get a table, there are chairs on the slightly sloping steps leading down to the boat area, where you can sit with a $5 Bud from the bar.

MEAT-PACKING DISTRICT

The gimmick at **APT** ★★★ (419 W. 13th St., between Ninth Ave. and Washington St.; ☎ 212/414-4245; www.aptwebsite.com; A, C, E to 14th St.; daily 7pm–4am) is that you're partying at someone's apartment, so the door is unmarked (look for the address). Once inside the upstairs bar, you're greeted by a painting of a mysterious occupant named "Bernard," pictures of him in his younger days in the recessed lounge, his bed (where less inhibited revelers sprawl later on in the night), and a number of cozy nooks, perfect for chatting over the not-too-loud music. Early in the evening, from 7 to 9pm, there are board games—Monopoly, dominoes, checkers—set out for Bernard's "guests." Downstairs is a happening dance club, where the crowd pulsates to the music, hemmed in by two long mahogany bars. ***A word of warning:*** APT sets up a velvet rope around 10pm so you have more chance of getting in earlier in the evening (see my suggestions for getting past the velvet ropes on p. 294).

> *"I was sitting in mcsorley's. outside it was New York and beautifully snowing.*
> *Inside snug and evil."*
>
> —EE Cummings

One of the few bars in the hopping Meat-Packing District for actual adults, **The Double Seven** ★ (418 W. 14th St., off Ninth Ave.; ☎ 212/981-9099; daily 5pm–4am; A, C, E to 14th St.) keeps its house music at a conversation-enhancing level and serves a bit of gourmet chocolate or a piece of cheese with each of its fabulous cocktails (made with such ingredients as fresh raspberry puree, honeysuckle, and top-flight champagnes). This being the ultra-popular Meat-Packing District, you're going to have to get by the guys at the velvet ropes, but you'll enjoy the mellow, sophisticated scene once inside.

FLATIRON DISTRICT

MTV meets ESPN at **The 40/40 Club** ★★★ (6 W. 25th St., between Broadway and Sixth Ave.; ☎ 212/989-0400; www.the4040club.com; Mon–Fri 5pm–4am, Sat–Sun 4pm–4am; Q, R to 23rd St.), a sports bar tricked out like a hip-hop mogul's crib. Which is exactly what this is—the side project of producer/artist/man-about-town Jay-Z. Inside are cushy white-leather couches (even fitted into the wide stairway between floors) and white-leather arm chairs hanging from the ceiling. Each seating nook comes with its own LCD flatscreen TV, broadcasting the day's big game. Can you say "bling bling"? In the main space, couples dance to hip-hop; next door the screens play VH1 and the soundtrack is salsa. Upstairs, the private party rooms sport everything you'll need to keep your "crew" happy: pool tables, entertainment centers, arcade games . . . one is even a cigar lounge (with state certification). Apparently, the entire enterprise cost a whopping $4 million to outfit, and I have to say, just from a sociological point of view, it's a fascinating place to visit. I have felt very comfortable doing so—the place gets a happily mixed crowd of all races and, perhaps as unusual, all ages.

CHELSEA

If the paint-chipped Vespas at the front of **Bar Veloce** ★ (176 Seventh Ave. between 20th and 21st sts.; ☎ 212/629-5300; http://barveloce.com; daily

5pm–3am; 1 to 18th St.) don't transport you directly to Milan, the tiramisu, panini, and "composed" plates will. This narrow wine bar is more than just an alcohol joint—here you can accompany that lovely glass of wine you've ordered (30 wines from all regions of "The Boot" are available) with freshly made, delicious, and affordable Italian snack foods. These high-falutin' sandwiches cost between $4 and $7, with wines rarely going above $10 a glass. Though it's relatively cheap, there's no skimping on sophistication here—the bartenders wear snazzy suits and ties; the decor is sleek blond woods and brushed steel; and the soundtrack is swinging bebop. A wonderful place to meet friends or to grab a snack and relax (beers, sake, and hard alcohol are also available).

Glass ✯ (287 Tenth Ave. at 26th St.; ☎ 212/904-1580; daily 5pm–4am; C, E to 23rd St.) is where you retreat to lick your wounds if you don't get past the velvet ropes at any of the surrounding dance clubs. And you know what? You'll have just as much fun at Glass, a mod, hopping place, tiled like the inside of a bathroom (somehow it works), with loud house music, a disco ball, and a bamboo-filled garden out back. Just don't imbibe so much that you forget why this place has the name it does: A two-way glass mirror allows anyone on the sidewalk to see the front part of the bathroom (not the stalls). It's hilarious just to stand there and watch the primping show as tipsy club-goers tug up tube tops, adjust lipstick, and simply gaze at themselves for minutes at a time.

Hang out and drink liberally with the media at **The Half King** ✯ (505 W. 23rd St. between Tenth and Eleventh aves.; ☎ 212/462-4300; daily 9am–4am; C, E to 23rd), a journalists' hangout, co-owned by Sebastian Junger, author of the best-selling book *The Perfect Storm.* With the look, food, and drinks of an English pub (go for a mug of the foamy Guinness and a plate of the shepherd's pie), it's a good place to get into a political argument (just be prepared to be outgunned). Readings and musical performances are occasionally scheduled in the large dining room on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday.

MIDTOWN EAST & WEST

For an F. Scott Fitzgerald experience in New York, go to the **Campbell Apartment** ✯✯✯ (in Grand Central Terminal, entrance at 15 Vanderbilt Ave.; ☎ 212/953-0409; daily 3pm–1am; 4, 5, 6, S to Grand Central), and drink the types of cocktails that Zelda over-imbibed: tall fruity drinks in oddly shaped glasses with such names as "Flappers Delight" and "Prohibition Punch." The "apartment" was once the office of tycoon John W. Campbell, who turned this 60-foot-long room into a replica of a Florentine palazzo, inlaying the ceiling and adding an ornate balcony. Visit on a weekend, early afternoon, or late evening when the commuting hordes will have already sloshed onto Metro-North, leaving you free to enjoy this elegant space in peace (or perhaps to the swing of a jazz band if you visit on a Sat night).

The premiere wine bar in the city, **Morell Wine Bar and Café** ✯✯ (1 Rockefeller Plaza, a short stroll from Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/262-7700; B, D to 50th St.) offers over 2,000 types of wine, many available by the glass. Although it can get crowded—it's in the heart of Rockefeller Center, after all—the scene never feels overly touristy, and the people-watching, especially from the sidewalk tables (open in good weather), can't be beat. Morell has a full menu to go along with the

wine, but it tends to be pricey. I recommend you get a bottle and a charcuterie plate, and watch the world go by.

SRO ★ (360 W. 53rd St. between Eighth and Ninth aves.; ☎ 212/765-6299; C to 50th St.) in New York parlance usually stands for either "standing room only" (at the theater) or "single room occupancy" (at welfare hotels). Both definitions are ironically appropriate for this secret Theater District bar, which hides behind an unmarked door down a small flight of stairs (you ring a doorbell to get in). Inside, you'll find yourself in a narrow, corridor-like space with art installations along the walls, a hip young crowd, very few seats, and one of the best alternative music playlists of any bar in New York. ***Note:*** This is a beer and wine place only; no mixed drinks are served.

For moguls and the models they squire, **Stone Rose** ★★★ (10 Columbus Circle, 4th floor; ☎ 212/823-9769; www.mocbars.com; A, B, C, D, 1 to Columbus Circle) is the current "see and be seen" bar. Owned by a bar mogul (Randy Gerber) and his model wife (Cindy Crawford), Stone Rose is an elegant 300-seat bar with gourmet bar food from famed chef Jean George Vongerichten. The drink prices, at $12 to $16 a pop, are on the high side of average, but they may well be worth the tab just to savor one of the loveliest views in New York (from floor-to-ceiling windows): Columbus Circle at night, lit up, with fountains spraying and Central Park slumbering in the background.

UPPER EAST SIDE

It takes a moment to register and then you suddenly realize why the atmosphere at **Lexington Bar and Books** (1020 Lexington Ave. at 73rd St.; ☎ 212/717-3902; www.barandboooks.net; 6 to 77th St.) is at once decidedly strange and deeply familiar: people are smoking (!) and no one is turning them in to the police. That's because Lexington Bar and Books is one of five "cigar bars" in the city with a special license allowing cigar smoking—and cigarettes by extension. So if you've been longing for the days of a cocktail with a cig, here's the place to come, though you'll have to dress up: This is a highly patrician bar, with a crowd in their later 30s and 40s, and a dress code requiring jackets in winter and collared shirts year-round. There's also an outpost in the Village (365 Hudson St. at Horation St.; ☎ 212/229-2642).

Every Friday and Saturday night, year-round, **The Balcony Bar at the Metropolitan Museum** ★★★ (Fifth Ave., between 84th and 80th sts.; www.met.org; 6 to 77th St.) hosts the most sophisticated cocktail party in town, with a string quartet sawing merrily in the background and hundreds of the city's most stylish singles downing wine and gazing at ancient Asian artifacts. In the warm weather months, the party moves to the roof Sculpture Garden with its magnificent views of Central Park. There's no better place in Manhattan to watch the sunset.

UPPER WEST SIDE

Prohibition ★ (503 Columbus Ave., between 84th and 85th sts.; ☎ 212/579-3100; www.prohibition.net; 1 to 86th St.) is a great neighborhood bar, with better-than-average bar food, a pool table in the back room, and live music every night of the week (usually funk or R&B). The staff is friendly, as are the patrons, and the Prohibition-era style murals and decor hit just the right note. This really

fun joint attracts a crowd that ranges from people in their 20s all the way to those in their 40s and 50s.

The sexiest bar in this part of town, **Shalel** ✯ (65 W. 70th St. between Central Park West and Columbus Ave.; ☎ 212/799-9030; B, C to 72nd St.) is a Moroccan hideaway carved into the basement of a restaurant. A warren of small rooms, each lit with candles and dim Arabian-style lights, it invites canoodling on couches just big enough for two, covered with mirrored throw pillows. If you can, snag a seat in the dark room in the back, where you'll sip cocktails in front of a small waterfall. ***Note:*** Shalel's a bit hard to find. Look for the tiny sign that will lead you to a candle-lit staircase and an alley; at the end of that is the lounge.

DANCE CLUBS

Fireflies on a hot July night give off a more lasting glow than most NYC dance clubs, which burst onto the scene (and the pages of the tabloids) one week, and then disappear the next. It's nearly impossible to track them, and from the time my fingers hit this keyboard to the time you read this book, most of the "hot" ones will be icy cold (or out of business). To find out where *the* scene is when you visit, pick up any celebrity rag or *Time Out* magazine, which does a good job of tracking the parties from week to week. You could also simply wander down to the Meat-Packing District (roughly Ninth Ave. to Tenth Ave., between 13th and 15th sts.) or West Chelsea (go to 27th or 28th sts. between Tenth and Eleventh aves.). Because of the lack of schools and churches in these neighborhoods, local zoning laws are more lenient here, allowing them to serve liquor until 4am. Some keep the music going even longer; it's not unusual to see dancers limping home at 5 and 6am in the morning.

Below I've listed some clubs that have proved their staying power (for now).

MEAT-PACKING DISTRICT

In business for over 3 years, **Lotus** (409 W. 14th St., between Ninth and Tenth aves.; Tues–Sun 11pm–4am, A, E, C to 14th St.) is middle-aged in the world of clubs, no longer attracting celebrities and the kinds of crowds that hope to mingle with them. It is still, however, a fun place to party, made up of three lounges piled one atop the other, all decorated in woodsy tones, with such mod elements as plush leather couches and undulating curtains of silver beads. The music is a good mix of up-to-the-minute disco and cool R&B. There's no real dance floor, but no one seems to mind dancing in the narrow corridors between the tables and the bar (and sometimes on the tabletops themselves). And since Lotus is no longer red-hot, you stand a pretty good chance of getting past the ubiquitous velvet ropes (unless you're a male alone on a Saturday night—then all bets are off). The club serves overpriced Pan-Asian food earlier in the evening; folks with dinner reservations automatically get past the ropes.

Cielo (18 Little W. 12th St., off Ninth Ave.; ☎ 212/645-5700; www.cieloclub.com; 10pm–4am, closed Tues and Sun; A, E, C to 14th St.) attracts a slightly older crowd of partiers in their late 20s and 30s, who prefer deep house music to commercial hip-hop and Top 40. The best nights are Monday and Wednesday when the club hosts its "Deep Space" and "Roots" parties, with well-known deejays (see the website for a lineup) and an open-door policy, so there's no hassle

getting in. It's an intimate, one-room space with a funky "tubular" decor (you just gotta see it) and a sunken dance floor. There's also a garden in the back for smokers. The best part? No VIP rooms, no attitude—you just come here if you really like to dance to great music.

The most difficult of the three Meat-Packing haunts to get into is **PM Lounge** (50 Gansevoort St., off Ninth Ave.; ☎ 212/255-6676; A, E, C to 14th St.). One of the district's top "beautiful people" spots, this is a smaller (450 people max) dance club with a distinctly Caribbean vibe (inside, the space is dominated by a large mural of Haitian men and women dancing, tall palm trees, and a characteristic island wall in the front—whitewashed and cut into small circles). The music is not reggae, calypso, Zook, or salsa, though; instead you get quick cuts between Top-40, hip-hop, and house music, thumping but not overpoweringly loud, and highly danceable. A very good time, if you can get by the off-duty firemen who serve as the bouncers.

CHELSEA

As I write this, **Marquee** (289 Tenth Ave. between 26th and 27th sts.; ☎ 646/473-0202; www.marqueeny.com; C, E to 23rd St.) is the flavor of the moment, a trendy see-and-be-seen place that's getting, yes, those names that usually "top the marquee" (all the celebrities that grace the pages of *Us Weekly*). I can't guarantee that it will be as molten by the time this book is published but it should still be cranking along, disappointing legions of club-clothed 20-somethings who can't get past the hulking doormen, and damaging the hearing of those who do make it in with its brain-exploding loud music. If you want to visit a hot New York club, complete with disco ball and writhing sea of dancers (the place was designed by the famed architectural firm of Philip Johnson, but it's so dark, you can't really see the design), this is the place, though I think anybody over the age of thirty will probably feel more comfortable elsewhere.

Crobar (530 W. 28th St., between Tenth and Eleventhth aves.; ☎ 212/629-9000 or 212/908-3455; C, E to 23rd St.) is the only other mega-dance club I recommend. The vast space can hold up to 1,500 party-goers at a time (it's a former metal foundry, so it's huge, the ceiling soaring 60 ft. above the floor to accommodate cranes). There's a 2,500-square-foot dance floor at its heart, with a disco ball and all kinds of strobe lighting. But you'll also find five smaller lounge spaces decorated with privacy-granting treelike poles, which make it a mellower scene than Marquee, as guests have a slightly quieter place to escape to from time to time. If you have trouble finding it, just look for the smoke—it drifts from the dance floor right out onto the street most nights.

MIDTOWN

Au Bar (41 E. 58th St., between Park and Madison aves.; ☎ 212/308-9455; www.aubarnewyork.com; 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.) may have recently changed its name to **Club 58,** but in the 15-odd years it's been on the scene, it hasn't changed its decor one iota (a rarity in the world of clubs and restaurants). Its "colonial manor turned dance club" look, with crystal chandeliers, faux leopard rugs, walls of "bookshelves," and weathered paintings of pith-helmeted men with native folks has proved a timeless draw, and the club still gets a very international clientele who come for the jazz in the early evenings (5–10pm) and the happening dance party after 10pm. The

biggest plus here is that you can sit at some of the tables with your drinks, without having to pony up $200 for "bottle service" (the biggest scam going at New York nightclubs today and now standard practice). Women are admitted free on Thursday nights. The rest of the week, both genders pay between $20 and $30 to get in.

GAY BARS & NIGHTCLUBS

Though the stats are shaky, most experts estimate that New York City is home to the largest gay population in North America, if not the world. All in all, there are about 70 major bars and nightclubs to suit every taste, wardrobe, and fetish, but the party only starts there. I'd recommend that you check out such publications as ***HX*** (www.hx.com; it's available in every gay bar for free), ***The Blade*** (again, available in gay bars), and the more mainstream ***Time Out*** **magazine** (on newsstands) for listings of these clubs as well as the innumerable dance parties, go-go and drag shows, gay knitting circles (yes, really), and other happenings that take place every week at dozens of venues around the city.

Top gay clubs/bars as I write this include

GAY BARS

Therapy ★★ (348 W. 52nd St., between Eighth and Ninth aves.; ☎ 212/397-1700; www.therapy-nyc.com; C, E to 50th St.) is a chic, candle-lit, two-floor bar that attracts a "pretty boys in Barney's shirts" crowd of buff 20- and 30-somethings for casual cruising. You could come here and meet the love of your life, or just have a drink. It's also a hangout for Broadway dancers and actors; you'll see them after 11pm, when the shows get out.

For "bears," "cubs," and the boys who love them, **The Eagle** ★ (554 W. 28th St., between Tenth and Eleventh aves.; ☎ 646/473-1866; www.eaglynyc.com; C, E to 28th St.) is the epicenter of the leather scene in New York. In fact, when I last visited, *The Sopranos* was casting for "leather types" on the second floor of this cavernous, dungeonlike two-floor club. Forgot your chaps? Not a problem—the Eagle has a tiny "leather goods" store on the first floor for all your codpiece and whipping needs. (There's also a quite civilized roof garden on the 3rd floor, open in good weather.)

Eight of Clubs (230 W. 75th St. off Broadway; ☎ 212/580-7389; 1, 2, 3 to 72nd St.) is a hidden neighborhood hangout (look for the rainbow flag) that has a weird but beautiful sculpture garden in the back, created by daytime bartender Walter. Look up and there are CDs and crutches hanging from the tree; look to the side and there's a Christmas tree created from eerily-lit water bottles; look down at one of the many fountains, where baby shoes adorn the edges. One of New York's secret hideaways.

You may remember the sleek, red-lit **XL** (357 W. 16th St., between Eighth and Ninth aves.; ☎ 646/336-5574; www.xlnyc.com; A, C, E to 14th St. or L to Eighth Ave.) from *Sex and the City* (it's the one with the fish tank urinal). It still has that MTV look and a crowd of handsome, fit men to match. A daily happy hour features $2 well drinks from 4 to 7pm and two-for-one drinks from 7 to 9pm.

New York's first gay sports bar, **Gym** ★ (167 Eighth Ave. between 18th and 19th sts.; ☎ 212/337-2439; www.gymsportsbar.com; A, C, E to 14th St., or L to Eighth Ave.) is filled with huge TV screens that not a single guy even glanced at when I last visited (although, according to the bartender, the Yankees do get

Getting Past the Velvet Ropes

There's nothing that will transport you back to the worst day of high school quicker than facing the gatekeeper at the door of a New York dance club. It's a humbling, depressing experience (especially if you don't get in), but there are ways to increase your odds of spending more time in the club than on the sidewalk.

1. **Choose your companions carefully**
   Large groups of men have little chance of getting into a club together, so if you're traveling in a pack of guys, split up until you get inside the club. Women have a better chance of getting in, as do couples.
2. **Dress the part**
   Look at the celebrity magazines and see what they're wearing when they sashay past the ropes. Usually it's an upscale casual look, but that will change season to season. Avoid suits at all costs, the same for "business casual," and if you plan to wear sneakers, make sure they're clean.
3. **Make nice**
   The "chooser" at the door has been entrusted by the owner to create a cool "mix" of people inside the club, so though you may not get in right away, you could be picked in 15 minutes, especially at a larger club, when they need more redheads, or tall women, or perhaps when the moon goes into Jupiter (I don't think even the gatekeepers have a clear idea of what they're looking for). You'll blow your chances, however, if you give the all-powerful guy at the door any argument

full attention when they've got a game). The crowd is casual, chatty, and friendly, like at most sports bars. There's a pool table and video games in the back, and a small patio out front.

A fabulous Art Deco space, once home to El Chico (a former flamenco cabaret whose murals still adorn the walls), **The Monster** (80 Grove St. at Sheridan Sq.; ☎ 212/924-3558; www.manhattan-monster.com; J, Z to Gates Ave.) has two faces. Upstairs is a piano bar with a crowd of show-tune crazy regulars; downstairs a groovy discothèque with go-go boys, a weekly drag show (Wed), and the most popular Latin Night (Mon) in the city.

LESBIAN BARS

Early in the evening, **The Cubby Hole** ★★ (281 W. 12th St. at the corner of 4th St.; ☎ 212/243-9041; 1, 2, 3 to 14th St. or L to Eighth Ave.) gets a mixed crowd from the neighborhood of men and even straight women, but by 11pm it's strictly "lipstick lesbians" and club girls rocking out to the jukebox. It's a fun scene

or attitude. Instead, wait patiently with a smile on your face, chatting with your companion, and you just might get in. Never wait more than 15 minutes at a club that can hold less than 500 (and would therefore be considered "exclusive") or half an hour at a larger place; at that point, it's pretty clear that they won't pick you.

4. **Call in advance for a reservation**
   Some dance clubs, such as Lotus (see above), have restaurants attached, and those who dine get automatic entry, later in the evening, to the dance club. You can also reserve a table at a club in advance for you and your guests, but be careful: Those who get a table are required to take "bottle service," which means you buy a bottle of liquor for you and your companions that can easily cost upwards of $300. Another ploy is to call in advance and ask for a bar reservation; it's not as surefire a method but sometimes it works (it all depends on how many advance reservations come in).
5. **Never admit to being a tourist**
   Clubs are where the worst New York snobbery comes to the fore. It's sad but true: They really don't want tourists. That doesn't mean you shouldn't go; just don't attempt to get in by telling them it's your "last night before you go back to Alabama."
6. **Say you're there to meet the deejay**
   This is my trickiest tip, but it actually works. Go to the club's website in advance, find out who the deejay will be that night, and say that you're meeting him or her inside.

and the decor is hilarious, with literally hundreds of paper animals and fish, Chinese lanterns, and plastic flying pigs dangling from the ceiling.

On the eastern edge of hopping Rivington St., **The Girls Room** (210 Rivington St., between Ridge and Pitt sts.; ☎ 212/995-8684; F, J, M, or Z to Delancey St.) is as much lounge as bar, with a small dance floor, pounding pop music, and an ever-rotating disco ball. Low, comfy couches along the wall offer space to those who'd rather converse than boogie.

Dominated by a large pool table (always in use) in the center room and two bars, the divey **Henrietta Hudson** (438 Hudson St. off Morton; ☎ 212/924-3347; 1 to Houston St.) is a favorite among Latinas and African-American women. Every night has a theme, with pool tournaments on Monday and karaoke on Wednesday night.

A congenial bi-level bar and grill with Victorian decor and a scattering of red Christmas lights, **Ruby Fruit** (531 Hudson St., between Charles and W. 10th sts.; ☎ 212/929-3343; 1, 2, 3 to 14th St., or L to Eighth Ave.) attracts an older crowd to both its restaurant and upstairs piano bar.

11 A Night at the Theater

Going to a show is the quintessential New York experience

YOU CAN TRAIPSE THE ENTIRE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, ATTEND A Yankees game, and ascend to the top of the Empire State Building, but you can't really say you've *done* New York until you spend an evening at the theater. It's an essential element in a New York City vacation, like going to the beach in Hawaii, slurping pasta in Italy, or snapping a picture with some poor sweaty guy in a mouse costume in Orlando. And though every 3 years or so some major critic issues an obituary declaring that New York theater is dead, somehow the corpse continues to rise from its glittering grave, producing Pulitzer Prize–winning plays, fine new musicals, and theatrical events of all sorts that just may, when done well, shift your perspective an iota, give you a peephole into another culture, or perhaps illuminate, for 2 fleeting hours, the human condition.

But how do you find that momentous play, that joyous musical, that thought-provoking performance-art piece? And then how do you snag an affordable ticket in a town where orchestra seats bought directly from the theater, or worse, from some commission-claiming concierge, can top $125 each? Here's what this New Yorker—and former actor—does to find a cheap seat. (Later in the chapter I'll also discuss how you can suss out which shows are worth your time and money.)

GETTING CHEAP(ER) SEATS

Let's start with a trade secret that no one in the theater industry wants you to know: Only suckers and out-of-towners pay full price for most Broadway and Off-Broadway shows. I'd say that, on average, only five or six shows *per year* get away with charging full price for their seats, eight shows a week. For the other 60-or-so productions, discounts *are the norm,* not the exception. Don't believe anyone who tells you otherwise.

Tried-and-true methods for saving on seats include

CULLING A DISCOUNT CODE FROM THE INTERNET

Booking tickets before you arrive is the most time-effective strategy: You're able to schedule your time in advance, get early dinner reservations, and not waste any of your precious New York vacation standing in line at box offices or ticket brokers. To do so, surf to one of the following websites, each of which is a treasure trove for valuable coupons and discount codes:

- **www.playbill.com**
- **www.theatermania.com**
- **www.broadwaybox.com**

Broadway Theaters

Al Hirschfeld **19**
Ambassador **11**
American Airlines **45**
American Place **34**
Barrymore **26**
Belasco **36**
Booth **30**
Broadhurst **23**
Broadway **4**
Brooks Atkinson **16**
Circle in the Square **10**
City Center Stage **2**
Cort **33**
Douglas Fairbanks **49**
Duffy **27**
Ethel Barrymore **14**
Eugene O'Neill **12**
Ford Center for the Performing Arts **44**
Gershwin **7**
Helen Hayes **40**
Imperial **18**
John Golden **20**
Longacre **15**
Lunt-Fontanne **28**
Lyceum **35**
Majestic **21**
Marquis **31**
Minskoff **38**
Mitzi E. Newhouse **1**
Music Box **25**
Nederlander **43**
Neil Simon **6**
New Amsterdam **42**
New Victory **41**
Palace **32**
Playwright's Horizons **48**
Plymouth **29**
Richard Rogers **17**
Royale **24**
Samuel Beckett **47**
St. James **22**
Shubert **39**
Stardust **8**
Studio 54 **3**
Town Hall **37**
Virginia **5**
Vivian Beaumont **1**
Walter Kerr **13**
WestSide **46**
Winter Garden **9**

Both **Playbill** and **Theatermania** are clubs that negotiate their own discounts with the theaters; in order to access their codes you must become a member. That's not a problem, though, as membership is free, the forms are easy, and both sites have strict privacy policies ensuring your information won't be sold. Once you gain access to these lists, you can score between 35% and 50% off the ticketed price of many, many shows—usually a full two-thirds of those playing at any one time.

Broadway Box, the other prominent player, has no membership fee, as it's actually a clearinghouse for discount codes from other sources. It, too, provides half-off coupons and codes (and occasionally discounts of 35%) for dozens of shows. The only sticky wicket here is that sometimes its printouts will not be accepted at the box office (though its codes always seem to work over the phone). I'm assuming that this has to do with the fact that it takes codes from other sites rather than negotiating its own.

The one negative to using these sites is that if you book over the phone or Internet, a handling fee will be tacked onto the cost of your ticket, usually between $4 and $5, but that would also be the case if you purchased full-priced seats remotely. I've also found that you won't have quite the number of choices you would enjoy at the TKTS booth in Times Square (and at the South Street Seaport), which is why I also recommend . . .

JOINING THE DREADED LINE AT TKTS

On an unsheltered, windy island in the center of Times Square—freezing in winter, sweltering in July and August—the TKTS booth has squatted since 1973, offering discounts of 25%, 35%, and 50% off theater tickets. As I said before, it presents a greater breadth of shows than do the online discounters, but you pay for that choice with your time (during busy periods the wait in line can be up to an hour). Those who do brave the line are often rewarded with $35 seats to Off-Broadway plays and $55 seats at big Broadway musicals.

But there are ways to "game" the line, including

- Go to the TKTS downtown at the South Street Seaport (see "What You Need to Know About TKTS," below, for the address and details). You'll rarely wait longer than 15 minutes here, and you can purchase matinee tickets the day before a show (at the Uptown booth, ticket purchases are day-of-show only). The only downside here: No day-of-matinee tickets are sold.
- Don't go early. Tickets are released from the theaters to the booths throughout the day, so you don't necessarily increase your chances of getting the show you want by going early in the day, or waiting in line before the booth opens. Instead, go when it's most convenient for you to do so.
- Go to the theater on a Tuesday night, which is the slowest night of the week. You'll encounter almost no line and will have a much bigger selection than usual. A few shows play Monday nights as well; your selection won't be big, but you probably won't have a long wait.
- Pick a play instead of a musical. In 2005, TKTS opened a window (no. 6) dedicated to the sale of plays only. The line for this window is much shorter.

What You Need to Know About TKTS

The Times Square Booth

Address: 46th Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue. Important: Do not confuse TKTS with the NY Information Center, right across the street from the booth; you'll pay full price plus commission if you purchase tickets at the latter.

(***Note:*** Until December of 2006, the Times Square booth will be temporarily located just outside the Marriott Marquis Hotel on West 46th Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue while a new booth is being constructed.)

Directions: Take the N, Q, R to 51st Street or the 1, 2, 3 to Times Square.

Hours: Monday through Saturday, 3 to 8pm; Sunday 3 to 8pm; additional matinee hours on Wednesday and Saturday 10am to 2pm.

The South Street Seaport Booth

Address: At the corner of Front St. and John St.

Directions: Take the 2, 3, 4, 5 to Fulton St.

Hours: Monday through Friday 11am to 6pm; Saturday 11am to 7pm; Sunday 11am to 4pm.

Special caveat: It sells matinee tickets the day before performance only.

Important: Both booths accept cash and traveler's checks only (no credit cards).

OTHER TICKET OPTIONS

If you want to see a highly popular show that is *not* offering discounts; or are on a very tight budget and would prefer to see a show for free, here are a couple of additional methods that might work for you:

Rush tickets A number of Broadway and Off-Broadway theaters have taken to offering "rush tickets" for the first row of seats on the day of a show. The average price is $25 for these neck-benders (it's preferable to be a couple of rows back—the sightlines are better and there's less danger of being spit on by performers). The rules and methods for their sale vary by show; sometimes these seats are only available to students, while in other cases any member of the public can get them (call the theater in advance to ask). In the past, these seats were given out on a first-come, first-served basis, but recently a number of the theaters have adopted a more humane lottery method. Instead of having to sit around for hours waiting, you simply show up at 5pm or so, take a lottery number and hope you get

Getting Good Seats to Sold-Out Shows

"House seats" are the seats reserved for members of the cast and crew of Broadway shows, and they're always the best seats in the house. If no one involved with the production wants to use them for a particular performance, they will usually go on sale to the public at the box office 48 hours before that show, between 5:30 and 6pm. These seats won't be cheap, but if there's a particular show that you want to see that's sold out, this may be your best means of snagging a seat.

picked (at the shows I've done it for, about 100 people showed up in hopes of winning 20 seats; not such bad odds).

Standing room Sold-out shows offer "standing room" tickets on the day of the show only, to about 10 people per show (depending on the size of the theater). They are sold at 10am when the box office opens, and for the really popular shows a line will form an hour earlier for these "standing spots" at the back of the house. The cost of these non-seats ranges from $15 to $25, again depending on the show.

Senior and student discounts Although Broadway theaters won't care how old you are or what you do, a number of the Off-Broadway houses do sell specially priced seats (sometimes for as little as $15) to seniors and students. While some do this on the day of show only, others allow these theatergoers to purchase in advance with the correct identification. Among the theaters that usually discount in this way are The Public Theater, the New York Theater Workshop, and The Vineyard Theater. You'll also occasionally find $5 tickets to Off-Broadway shows for teenagers (and their chaperones) at a wonderful website called **High Five** (www.high5tix.org). If you're traveling with a teen, check the site before buying any tickets.

Ushering A number of New York theaters use volunteer ushers. The shows get free labor, while you, the usher, get to see a show without paying (or really even working that hard). Here's how it works: You show up an hour before curtain time dressed in black pants and a white button-down shirt; the management then teaches you the layout of the theater, and once patrons arrive, you help them find their seat and hand out playbills. As the lights dim, you scuttle into your own seat and enjoy the show. After the show, management may ask you to stick around for 15 minutes to help pick up discarded programs, but that's about it.

Theaters that use volunteer ushers include

- **The American Airlines Theater** (227 W. 42nd St.; ☎ 212/719-9393; www.roundabouttheatre.org). The only Broadway theater that uses volunteer ushers; call at least 3 weeks in advance to secure a spot.
- **Astor Place Theater** (434 Lafayette St.; ☎ 212/254-4370; www.bluemen.com). The home of Blue Man Group accepts four ushers per performance; call 1 week in advance.

Theater Basics

There are three types of theaters in New York City: Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway. They differ in size of theater, price, and esthetic:

Broadway shows: Tend to be performed in the Times Square area (the one exception being the shows at Lincoln Center; see chapter 10). They cost, without a discount, between $46 for a balcony seat (as little as $26 at some plays), to $100 for an orchestra seat, all the way up to $225 for a so-called "premium" seat at certain musicals.

Off-Broadway shows: Are performed in venues all over town, with a good many now clustered in the Union Square area. Top prices for Off-Broadway musicals rarely go above $69, with plays topping out (usually) at $55. Off-Broadway theaters are much smaller than those on Broadway, pay less to cast and crew, and are thus able to present more controversial, less commercial plays and musicals. Many of the recent Pulitzer Prize drama winners began as Off-Broadway shows.

Off-Off-Broadway shows: Are staged in very small theaters, often featuring experimental works or actor's showcases. These productions also play in theaters all over town; some of the best-known venues are PS 142, The Ontological Hysterical Theater, The Performing Garage, and Here. Although you'll rarely see these shows advertised or even reviewed in the *New York Times,* they will be listed in the *Village Voice* and *Time Out* magazine.

Schedule: Broadway and most Off-Broadway shows perform eight times a week, most commonly Tuesday through Sunday, though some do play on Monday (instead of Tues or Sun). Matinee (daytime) performances are usually presented at 2pm on Wednesday and Saturday, and 3pm on Sunday. Evening performances take place 8pm Wednesday through Saturday, 7pm on Tuesday night. And if a show is geared towards children, evening performances may be even earlier—be sure to check before buying.

- **The Century Theater** (111 E. 15th St.; ☎ 212/982-7682, ext. 11). Houses a wide variety of Off-Broadway shows. Call as soon as you know you'll be in town; the theater starts booking ushers the day tickets go on sale, and spots are coveted.
- **Irish Repertory Theater** (132 W. 22nd St.; ☎ 212/255-0270; www.irishrepertorytheater.com). Accepts two ushers per show; call at least 2 weeks in advance.
- **Lucille Lortel Theater** (121 Christopher St.; ☎ 212/924-2817; www.lortel.org). A top Off-Broadway venue, it takes three ushers per show and starts booking them a week before a show opens (to find out when that is, check the website).

- **New York Theater Workshop** (79 E. 4th St.; ☎ 212/780-9037; www.nytw.org). Five volunteer ushers per night; call 2 weeks ahead.
- **Playwrights Horizons** (416 W. 42nd St.; ☎ 212/564-1235, ask for Brad Ellis). Uses four ushers per show on its main stage; three for its smaller, studio productions. The theater starts "hiring" ushers 2 weeks before the first preview of a show, so call as soon as you know you'd like to attend a performance.
- **Second Stage Theater** (307 W. 43rd St.; ☎ 212/787-8302; www.secondstagetheater.com). Hires the most ushers (six) per show. They request that volunteers send an e-mail (to jschelifer@secondstagetheatre.com) 3 weeks in advance rather than calling.
- **The Signature Theater Company** (555 W. 42nd St.; ☎ 212/244-7529; www.signaturetheatre.org). Uses four ushers per show; starts accepting volunteers 3 weeks before a performance begins.
- **The Vineyard Theater** (108 E. 15th St., off Union Sq.; ☎ 212/353-0303; www.vineyardtheatre.org). Three volunteer ushers per performance; call 3 weeks ahead.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SHOW TO SEE

I'll admit it: I'm a walker. If I accidentally pick an awful show, I leave at intermission rather than fork out extra money to the babysitter so that I can sit through something dull. It doesn't happen that often because over the years, I've formulated the following rules to help me choose which shows to see.

Skip the long-running Broadway musicals There should be an expiration date on Broadway musicals, just as there is on milk. After about 2 years, they turn sour.

Here's why: The first cast usually leaves around the 1-year mark, and then a second cast is announced to much fanfare. When it comes to the third go-round, the big-name actors aren't willing to take over the roles, so they get lesser-known pros in the parts. These second-tier actors aren't any less talented, but because they have no clout they never get to rehearse with the director and put their own mark on the role. Instead, they are "put in" by a stage manager, and are expected to re-create what the previous actor did; that can lead to wooden, dull performances. The chorus, which usually stays with the show for a few years, simply becomes bored and starts sleepwalking through their performances. I foolishly took my niece to see *Chicago* in its sixth year on Broadway, and it was utterly transformed from the vibrant, sexy show I had seen in previews to a Fosse-version of *Night of the Living Dead.*

You can find out how long a show has been on by calling the theater; asking the folks at the TKTS booth; looking at Telecharge.com (which lists when shows opened); or checking *The New Yorker* magazine, which lists "long-running" shows separately in its theater section.

Beware the "un-nominated" Broadway shows It doesn't matter which shows win a Tony Award—that's pretty much a crapshoot. But the nominating committee, which is made up of distinguished theater professionals—actors, writers, producers,

and the like—is savvy about theater and usually does a good job rewarding the most interesting shows with nominations in late May. If a new play, musical, or revival can't manage to get a nod (and in some years there's very little competition for nominations), take it as a sign that your theater dollars may be better spent elsewhere. Each show that gets nominations will trumpet that fact in their ads (but don't punish the Off-Broadway shows, as only Broadway shows are eligible for the Tonys). A good source for this type of information is the Telecharge.com site, which lists nominations and awards for each show.

Do a bit of research before you buy The Web is a treasure trove of information, including past reviews of shows. Instead of going blindly to the TKTS line (see above), surf to **www.theater2nytimes.com** before you get to New York and pick a show that's garnered a fair number of good reviews. While the reviewers aren't always right (and lately, I think the *New York Times* critics have been really off in their recommendations; John Lahr of *The New Yorker* has better taste), at least by reading up you'll have a better idea of what the shows are about.

Avoid "Juke Box Musicals" *Mamma Mia!* set off a frenzy of shows that simply take the catalogue of some famous pop composer and then string songs together with a silly, inorganic story. You'll hear better renditions of these songs at your local theme park—don't go!

Consider seeing an Off-Broadway show Because of the huge financial pressures on Broadway producers, they usually (but not always) stick with tried-and-true formulas, revivals, or shows with a clear marketing hook. For anything slightly edgy or even intellectual, you often need to go to the smaller Off-Broadway theaters (see the "Theater Basics" box, above). These theaters also tend to charge substantially less for tickets, sometimes shaving $25 to $50 off the cost of a seat.

Kids' Night on Broadway

For two Tuesday nights each winter (usually in late Jan, early Feb), the League of American Theater Producers does something unheard of—it gives away free seats to a number of Broadway shows. These freebies have a purpose: They're the Broadway community's attempt to create new theatergoers out of young people between the ages of 6 and 18. Note that each child must be accompanied by an adult who is paying full price for the tickets, and that tickets must be purchased in pairs. I took my then-6-year-old daughter to see *Fiddler on the Roof* thanks to this program, and sitting in an audience full of families, seeing a classic musical, was truly a golden affair. At the end of the show, the cast traditionally gives a short talk for the children, which only adds to the experience. For full details, go to www.kidsnightonbroadway.com or www.nycvisit.com; be sure to book your tickets several months in advance, as these nights inevitably sell out.

Although I can't guarantee that you'll always see a great show, the following Off-Broadway theater companies consistently produce exciting, award-winning productions. They are

- **New York Theatre Workshop** (79 E. 4th St., between Second Ave. and the Bowery; ☎ 212/460-5475; www.nytw.org; 6 to Astor Place). The continued success of this intellectually heady and sometimes avant garde company may just boil down to the unerring good taste of Artistic Director James Nicola. **Biggest hits include:** *Rent* (Pulitzer Prize), *Quills,* and *Mad Forest.*
- **The New Group** (410 W. 42nd St., between Ninth and Tenth aves.; ☎ 212/334-3380; www.thenewgroup.org; A, E, C to 42nd St.). The youngest of the Off-Broadway theater companies and the one that's had the highest number of both critical and popular successes in the past few years, the New Group specializes in both revivals of modern classics and new plays. It's known for the high caliber of the acting in its productions. **Biggest hits include:** *Hurleyburley* (with Ethan Hawke and Parker Posey), *SIN* (with John Cullum), and *Aunt Dan and Lemon* (with Kristen Johnson and Lili Taylor).
- **Playwrights Horizons** (416 W. 42nd St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/564-1235; www.playwrightshorizons.org; 1, 2, 3, N, R, S to Times Sq., A, E, C to 42nd St.). Dedicated to nurturing the art of the writer (lyricists and librettists as well as playwrights), Playwrights has always had a great eye for talent, producing the works of Stephen Sondheim, Kenneth Lonergan, Christopher Durang, A. R. Gurney, and Wendy Wasserstein. **Biggest hits include:** *I Am My Own Wife* (Pulitzer Prize), *Driving Miss Daisy* (Pulitzer Prize), *Sunday in the Park with George* (Pulitzer Prize), *The Heidi Chronicles* (Pulitzer Prize), *March of the Falsettos.*
- **The Public Theater** (425 Lafayette St., off Astor Place; ☎ 212/564-1235; www.publictheater.org; 6 to Astor Place). A strong emphasis on American playwrights, especially Asian-, Latin- and African-American writers, has kept this theater in the forefront of "the scene" since 1967. **Biggest hits include:** *A Chorus Line* (Pulitzer Prize), *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk* (Pulitzer Prize), *Elaine Stritch at Liberty* (Tony Award), *Topdog/Underdog* (Pulitzer Prize), and the monologues of Anna Deveare Smith. In all, Public Theater productions have been awarded 40 Tonys (for shows that moved to Broadway) and 138 Off-Broadway or "Obie" awards.
- **Signature Theatre** (555 W. 42nd St.; ☎ 212/244-PLAY; www.signaturetheatre.org; A, E, C to 42nd St.). Devotes each season to just one playwright, who gets to choose which works he or she wants represented. Because the theater picks only established playwrights to showcase, the productions are often peopled by these bigwigs' big-name actor friends, meaning that star-gazing is virtually guaranteed. But so is fresh, often compelling theater. **Biggest hits include:** *Burn This* (with Edward Norton) and *The Fifth of July* (with Robert Sean Leonard and Parker Posey).
- **The Vineyard Theatre** (108 E. 15th St., off Union Sq.; ☎ 212/353-0303; www.vineyardtheatre.org; 4, 5, 6, N, R to Union Sq.). The Vineyard may well be the biggest risk-taker of the major Off-Broadway theaters, presenting out-and-out performance art alongside less far-out plays and musicals. When they're good, they're great; and when their shows miss the mark, they're still

usually intellectually intriguing. **Biggest hits include:** *Avenue Q* (Tony Award), *Three Tall Women* (Pulitzer Prize), and *How I Learned to Drive* (Pulitzer Prize).

- **Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM;** 30 Lafayette Ave. and 651 Fulton St., both in Brooklyn; www.bam.org; ❷, ❸, ❹, ❺, Ⓑ, Ⓠ to Atlantic Ave.). For European performance art and dance, BAM has no peer in New York; it's the premier house for this type of work. **Biggest hits include:** Works by Pina Bausch, Ingmar Bergman, Peter Brook, and Robert Wilson.

CHILDREN'S THEATER

Broadway theaters do not allow children under the age of 5 to attend, nor do they give discounts to kids (with one exception—see below). But beyond Broadway is affordable, often mesmerizing theater that's aimed squarely at the pre-puberty crowd, with dozens of offerings each week. Two organizations in particular present a roster of consistently challenging and entertaining family shows.

New Victory Theater (209 W. 42nd St., just off Broadway; ☎ 646/223-3020; www.newvictory.org; tickets $10–$30; ❶, ❷, ❸, Ⓢ, Ⓝ, Ⓠ, Ⓡ, Ⓦ to Times Sq.) is an organization that books shows from around the U.S. and abroad that are inventive and smart enough for the entire family to enjoy. One musical that made its debut here even moved to Broadway (now how about that for a kiddie show?). Past offerings have included quality puppet shows, acrobatic and circus troupes, "new vaudeville" acts, and theater pieces (you can see a preview of their offerings on their website, thanks to streaming video).

In 2005, after years of touring the United States and presenting highly acclaimed shows at schools, theaters, and even football stadiums, **Theaterworks NYC** (121 Christopher St. between Bleeker and Hudson sts.; ☎ 212/279-4200; www.theatreworksusa.org; tickets $35; ❶ to Christopher St.) decided to create a home base for itself in Greenwich Village. Now, nearly every weekend of the year it presents lively, educational shows, often based on classic children's books such as *Curious George, Charlotte's Web* and *Harold and the Purple Crayon.* Many of the authors and performers who've worked at Theaterworks have gone on to stellar Broadway careers, so this is a good place to see new talent first.

12 The Essentials of Planning

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF A VISIT TO NEW YORK—THE TOP SIGHTS AND activities, the hotels, restaurants, shops, and spectacles that best serve your needs—have filled the bulk of this book. But almost as important is the miscellany that doesn't fit into broader categories. Those nitty-gritty details—from trip-planning essentials to perks to tips for travelers with special interests and needs—are what you'll find in this chapter.

The good news is that New York is undeniably a visitor-friendly city and has, in its tourist office (which goes by the appropriately show-bizzy name **NYC & Company;** ☎ 212/484-1200; www.nycvisit.com), one of the best resources in the U.S. for travelers. It's a well-run, efficient organization staffed by real experts who love their jobs, and its website offers a wealth of information and discounts for the traveler. Anything that you can't find in this book—and hopefully that won't be much—you should be able to find through the tourist office.

WHEN TO VISIT?

"Anytime you like," is the short answer. New York is a 12-month, 24-hour destination, and there's always something exciting going on here.

Significantly, New York does not experience the real extremes of temperature of a Minneapolis or Phoenix. Yes, we get snowstorms and 10-degree weather, but rarely for more than a day or two, with the snow usually scooped into graying piles overnight. We also have heat waves, but it's unusual for the temperature to break 100°F for more than 4 or 5 days each summer, though it will be a sticky heat when it hits and none too pleasant. In general, this type of extreme heat only hits in late July and August, with the most blustery and bitterly cold days falling in January and February, and occasionally December. (Of course, in this age of global warming you never know what will happen with the weather, but mild year-round temps have been the norm for a few years now and seem to have stabilized—see the chart below.)

Culture, too, is a year-round exercise. Most of the major plays, musicals, and art shows debut between September and May, so those who like to be on culture's cutting edge visit then. In the summer months NYC teems with arts events as the city transforms itself into an outdoor theater/concert hall, with dozens of free shows—from Shakespeare in the Park to Shakespeare in the Parking Lot—crowding the calendar and delighting penny-pinchers. All of the major art institutions participate in this summer free-for-all, with the Museum of Modern Art sponsoring concerts in its sculpture garden, the Metropolitan Opera bringing music to the parks, and dozens of other institutions, large and small, established and unknown, jumping on the alfresco bandwagon.

So what it all comes down to, in my mind, is cost, and here there is a *major* difference between seasons. Persons who visit in the slower months pay the right

amount for their lodging, and those who come when the city is crowded—and here I'm going to sound like the clichéd New Yorker—get screwed.

So when are prices the most moderate? Deep winter, in the months of January (after the 4th) and February, it's not at all unusual to find a lovely room for as little as $89 a night. Visit in the fall, especially November and December, and that same room, in the same hotel, could cost upwards of $200 a night. Spring is also pricey, albeit slightly less so than in fall, and prices drop into a middle range in summer. Room rates over Christmas, New Year's, and Thanksgiving reach their pinnacles for the year. If you must visit at those times, get ready to pay a good $50 more than even the pricey fall rates.

The table below charts seasonal weather and price shifts. Look at both in tandem when planning your trip.

New York Average Temperature, Rainfall & Hotel Prices

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Hi/Low Daily Temps (°F)	39/26	40/27	48/34	61/44	71/53	81/63	85/68	83/66	77/60	67/51	54/41	41/30
Hi/Low Daily Temps (°C)	4/-3	5/-3	8/1	16/6	21/11	27/17	29/18	28/19	25/16	19/10	12/5	5/-1
Days of Precipitation	11	10	11	11	11	10	11	10	8	8	9	10
Hotel Room Cost*	$89	$89	$105	$149	$179	$179	$155	$155	$180	$180	$189	$195

**Excluding holiday periods, an average for a moderate double room with private bathroom (you can sometimes do better; see accommodations chapter).*

New York's Visit-Worthy Events

When planning your vacation, you may want to look at what special events or yearly festivals might be occurring during the time of your visit. I've included a very limited sampling below of what I consider to be the "visit-worthy" events. As I can make no claims to psychic abilities, I can't include all of the nifty happenings that haven't yet been announced, so this is necessarily an incomplete list. To get a complete picture, pick up a copy of ***Time Out* magazine** when you arrive. The "Around Town" section will leave you dizzy—usually there are upwards of 150 interesting events happening any one week. For a more selective listing, buy the current ***New Yorker*** magazine, which devotes the first tenth of its pages to its picks for the most intellectually stimulating or artistically important events of the week.

January

New York National Boat Show: The septuagenarian trade show (it turned 101 in 2006) is devoted to boats of all sorts, from yachts to pontoon boats to canoes. It starts every year on New Year's Eve and runs for the next 2 weeks, dazzling seafaring types at the Jacob Javits Convention Center with all the latest gadgets, gear, and crafts. Go to **www.discoverboating.com** for full information.

Chinese New Year: Based on the lunar calendar, Chinese New Year always falls sometime in January or February, with 2 weeks of parades, festive meals, and special performances staged throughout Chinatown. Call ☎ **212/484-1222** or go to **www.nycvisit.com** for full details.

Winter Restaurant Week: A misnomer, because this gourmet shindig actually lasts 2 weeks (reappearing in summer for another 2; see below), this is the time of year when cheap foodies can try out the city's best restaurants for as little as $25 at lunch, $35 at dinner for three courses at each meal. For a full discussion of this event, go to p. 84.

February

Fashion Week: Early February is when the American designers parade their new lines for the press and big department store buyers, and it's impossible to get tickets to the runway shows (they go to the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow and Madonna). I only mention Fashion Week here because the event can tie up rooms at the Midtown hotels, raising prices (better to stay Downtown or Uptown when the fashionistas are in town).

Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show: I've always found it funny that Fashion Week—that parade of "Best in Breed" women—should be followed directly by a dog show. At least at the dog show, they're upfront about the purpose of the spectacle. The winnowing from just cute to anatomically awesome takes place the second weekend of the month at Madison Square Garden. With over 2,500 pooches appearing, it's quite the spectacle. For information, check out **www.westminsterkennelclub.org**.

March

St. Patrick's Day (March 17): Thanks to one of the largest Irish-American populations in the United States, St. Paddy's is an enormous event in NYC, rivaling only New Year's Eve for its displays of public inebriation. Every pub in town throws a party, and in the afternoon, all of 150,000 marchers parade down Fifth Avenue from 44th to 86th streets.

The Triple Pier Expo: Never heard of it? Then you obviously aren't into antiques and collectibles, as this is one of the largest shows in the world for folks who care about old stuff. Taking place on the Passenger Ship Terminal Piers for a weekend mid-month, the show draws literally hundreds of treasure seekers. For details, call ☎ **212/255-0020** or access **www.stellashows.com**.

April

The Easter Parade: No floats, no marching bands, just ordinary people in extraordinary hats mark Easter in one of the city's most low-key but charming celebrations. Most spend the afternoon strolling up and down in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, but Fifth Avenue from 57th Street all the way down to 45th is closed to traffic from 11am to 4pm, with the greatest number of chapeaus in evidence around noon.

New York International Automobile Show: Care about cars? Then you'll want to attend this massive yearly expo, which takes over the Javits Center for an entire week and jams it with Hummers, Hondas, and Hyundais (and all the new driving gadgets that go along with steering a vehicle down the road). In 2006, the show took place between April 14 and 23; find more info at ☎ **718/746-5300** or **www.autoshowny.com**.

The TriBeCa Film Festival: Founded by Robert DeNiro and Jane Rosenthal in 2002, this little film festival has quickly grown into one of the most influential in the nation. You'll see films from all over the world here, from big studio pictures to tiny independent films from places such as Slovakia and Dubai. And unlike other film fests, this one is truly for all ages, with a nifty street fair on the second weekend (usually featuring a zoo and rides), as well as children's films throughout the 2-week event, which has run from the last week in April into the first week of May in the past 3 years. To learn more, visit **www.tribecafilmfestival.org**.

May

Fleet Week: Over a dozen naval and Coast Guard ships, along with vessels from around the world, sail into New York's welcoming harbor each year and moor here for the week preceding Memorial Day (the last Mon in May). You'll see sailors in their dress whites all over town, or you can go and visit the guys and gals on their own ships. At the docks and at the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum (p. 154), there will be "Best Chow" competitions, athletic matches, a parade of ships and, of course, Memorial Day ceremonies. See **http://fleetweek.navy.mil** for more info.

June

Shakespeare in the Park: More than just a show, this free Shakespeare program is a yearly highlight, marrying top talent with warm, starry nights for an unforgettable theatrical experience. In recent years, Meryl Streep, Natalie Portman, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Liev Schrieber, and Kevin Kline have trod these boards in plays by the Bard and classic American musicals. Snagging one of the free tickets is not easy, requiring a minimum 3-hour wait in line (longer if the show's a popular one). Tickets are distributed at 1pm, both on the path in Central Park in front of the theater and at the Public Theater downtown (the line's usually shorter here). Go to **www.publictheater.org** for full information.

Central Park Summerstage: The musical equivalent of Shakespeare in the Park, though it's not free, Summerstage primarily hosts world music and alternative rock stars for afternoon and evening concerts. For a complete lineup, go to **www.summerstage.org**.

Summer Restaurant Week: Same as the 2-week winter fest (see above), but with better weather. For specific dates, go to **www.nycvisit.com**.

The Belmont Stakes: The final event in horse racing's grand trifecta of events (the Kentucky Derby and The Preakness are the first two). Any horse able to win all three instantly enters the record books and his owner becomes a multi-millionaire, thanks to the breeding fees he'll be able to collect for the rest of that horse's life. Folks arrive at this jolly, crowded event in Queens before the actual race so they can view the horses and socialize. In 2006, the race will take place on June 10. For more information, call ☎ **516/488-9622** or head online to www.nyra.com/belmont.

Mermaid Parade: A smaller, nautically themed, daytime version of Greenwich Village's Halloween Parade, the Mermaid Parade takes place towards the end of June each year in Coney Island. Founded in 1983, the parade has the same kind of home-grown ambience and raunch as its Greenwich Village counterpart. Along with the ball that follows, featuring performances by local burlesque acts, the event is a heckuva a lot of fun. Get details at **www.coneyisland.com** or call ☎ **718/372-5159**.

July

Fourth of July: New York has less spectacular celebrations for the Fourth than, say Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, or Boston, but Macy's does put on a fab fireworks show over the East River. Go to www.nyc.com/holiday/july4 for advice on where to watch the action. The rockets usually start blasting around 9pm.

Lincoln Center Festival: More than any place in the city except Central Park, Lincoln Center is abuzz with indoor and outdoor fests throughout the summer. **Midsummer Nights Swing** brings big bands to the Lincoln Center Plaza on Fridays in July and August for nights of romance and dancing; an included lesson is offered at 6pm for beginning ballroomers. The **New York Philharmonic,** usually based at Lincoln Center, visits parks in all five boroughs for free concerts (for a schedule, call ☎ **212/875-5709** or

check out **www.nycgovparks.org**). The **Mostly Mozart Concert,** an indoor offering, brings master musicians from all over the world to play the music of the 18th-century master. And the festival that actually has the name "Lincoln Center Festival" (I'm sliding these others under its umbrella), is a multidiscipline feast of performances featuring the best of contemporary theater, music, dance, and even puppet shows. You can find out more about the lineup, prices, and dates by surfing to **www.lincolncenter.org**.

August

U.S. Open: For one brief, bright-tennis-whites moment each year at the end of August (and into Sept), the city becomes a center for international sport with the start of the U.S. Open, one of tennis's four Grand Slam events. For full information, go to p. 216.

Wigstock: "The world's most celebrated drag-oriented pansexual extravaganza," to quote the founders of this yearly late-summer fest (sometimes it happens in early Sept, sometimes Aug), takes over Thompkins Square Park and fills it with pink boas, platinum-blonde bouffant wigs, and all manner of guys dressed as gals and vice versa. The parade and performances are a hoot; go to **www.wigstock.nu** for full information.

September

Fashion Week: Part 2 (see above), and because the city's already more crowded in fall, hotel rates can rise even more sharply. Try to avoid visiting this week if you can, as you're unlikely to get into any of the fashion shows but will have to contend with drastically higher prices for lodging. Go to **www.olympusfashionweek.com** for details on the dates.

Feast of San Gennaro: Coils of Italian sausages as long as cobras, carnival games, crowds, and tables full of trinkets mark New York's largest Italian fest, held over 11 days in mid-September in Little Italy. Don't make a special trip for it, but if you happen to be in town, it can be fun.

October

October 31 Halloween Parade: Men in drag, women in drag, giant coughing chickens ("avian flu"), zombies dancing to Michael Jackson's *Thriller*—all these apparitions and more made their appearance at the 2005 parade, and you'll see their like if you attend. This is New York's most outrageous event and the largest Halloween parade in the world. Some locals spend all year working on their costumes; if you dress up, you can march, too. For information on how to do that, and for the parade routing (which changes), call the *Village Voice* Parade hot line at ☎ **212/475-3333,** ext. 14044; or go to **www.halloween-nyc.com**. To snag a viewing spot in Greenwich Village along the parade route, you'll need to show up at about 5pm (2 hr. before the parade starts) . . . or have a nice dinner and show up at 9pm to view the second half. The crowd will have thinned by then, and because the event usually doesn't end until close to 11pm, you'll have more than enough time to enjoy it.

November

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade (4th Thurs of the month): Macy's yearly extravaganza combines massive hot-air balloons of cartoon characters with floats, clowns, and performances by the casts of Broadway musicals and pop stars (usually lip-synching atop floats). It wends its way down Central Park West to Columbus Circle and then heads down Broadway to Macy's at 34th Street. In order get a good view, you'll need to snag a spot along the route no later than 8am (the parade begins at 9am). Avoid Columbus Circle and Broadway from 36th Street down to 34th Street—these are the VIP areas set aside for TV cameras and bigwigs (and no one else). The night before the parade, an impromptu party

sprouts on 77th Street as hundreds of people gather to see the balloons being inflated. For more information, call ☎ **212/484-1222** or **212/494-2922.**

Holiday Decorations: Starting the day after Thanksgiving (and often even before that), the entire city dresses up for Christmas, stringing lights, hanging tinsel, and inserting the computer chips into all of the moving figurines that have, of late, hijacked the windows of the city's large department stores. The best street to see the trimmings, by far, is **Fifth Avenue, between 39th and 59th streets.** Along with the spectacular windows at the big department stores—**Saks Fifth Avenue, Lord & Taylor, Bergdorf Goodman,** and **Tiffany's**—you'll also want to admire the massive fir tree at Rockefeller Center (off Fifth Ave., at 51st St., usually lit in late Nov; go to **www.rockefellercenter.com** for more details). The windows at **Macy's (34th St. at Broadway)** are also deservedly famous, as is the indoor winter wonderland display at the heart of which is a Santa, waiting to hear your tots' Christmas wishes (just like in *Miracle on 34th Street*). **Madison Avenue between 55th and 60th streets,** is also worth a stroll, and if you have the time, drop by **Bloomingdales (Lexington Ave. between 59th and 60th sts.)** for its yearly display.

Chanukah is also a big deal in this city, with the largest Jewish population outside of Israel. On Fifth Avenue at 59th Street, a giant menorah—at 32 feet it's the largest in the world—is lit each year on the first night of Chanukah and for 7 nights thereafter. On the first and final evenings, steaming *latkes* (potato pancakes) are distributed at sunset, and live music accompanies the electric candle-lighting. The dates for Chanukah shift according to the Hebrew calendar, so it can start as early as mid-November or as late as Christmas (in 2006, the 1st night is Dec 15). Call ☎ **212/736-8400** for more information.

The Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular: This New York tradition now starts well before Thanksgiving, and it's still as extravagantly kitschy as ever, with laser-light shows, onstage ice-skating, horses, camels, and, of course, the fabulous Rockettes, executing their 300-plus kicks per show. Shows run approximately 7 days a week, with six daily performances (on many dates) starting at 9am and going until 10pm. For more information, call ☎ **212/247-4777** or go to **www.radiocity.com**.

The Nutcracker: Ballet impresario George Balanchine's masterpiece. The music is by Tchaikovsky, and half the cast is under 15, culled from New York City Ballet's famous dance school at Juilliard. Your children will love it, though it's an expensive treat, with orchestra seats going for $99 apiece ($28 seats up in the nosebleeds). The show sells out early, so make your reservations in October if you can, when the seats first go on sale. For details, check out **www.nycballet.com** or call ☎ **212/870-5570.**

Classical Music at the Metropolitan Museum: Several times during the holiday season, the Met stages concerts in its glorious medieval sculpture hall. The pairing of carols and art is unbeatable, making this one of the season's loveliest events. Dates and prices are listed at **www.metmuseum.org**.

December

The Messiah Sing-Along: Shower singers take note: Here's your chance to make your debut at Lincoln Center. Each year, usually in the last 2 weeks of December, 3,000 singers lug their own librettos to Avery Fisher Hall for a roughly 3-hour performance of Handel's *Messiah*—the audience is the chorus, backed up by a world-renowned orchestra, with rising opera stars taking the solos. Train wrecks do occur, and if you have an off-key crooner next to you (as I did when I attended), it can detract from the moment, but when all is going well,

there are few experiences as soul-stirring. You can find more information at **www.lincolncenter.org**.

New Year's Eve: The "ball drop" in Times Square is just one of the celebrations for kicking off the New Year (and the least appealing one in my opinion). If you must do the Times Square thing, get there early to secure a spot in which to stand—no later than noon—and then get set for a long, chilly wait until midnight. You'll be elbow to elbow with people from all over the world—though none from New York, as the locals avoid this part of town like the plague on December 31. They're more likely to be taking part in the **midnight run around Central Park** (☎ **212/860-4455; www.nyrrc.org**), watching the fireworks over Central Park, or attending the lovely New Year's Eve Concert for Peace at St. John the Divine, a yearly highlight, featuring new works from top New York composers (**www.stjohndivine.org**).

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-AMERICAN CITIZENS

Be sure to check with the U.S. embassy or consulate for the very latest in entry requirements, as these continue to shift since 9/11. Full information can be found at the **U.S. State Department's** website, www.travel.state.gov.

VISAS

As of this writing, citizens of western and central Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore need only a valid passport and a round-trip air ticket or cruise ticket to enter the U.S. Canadian citizens can also enter without a visa; you simply need to show proof of residence.

Citizens of all other countries will need to obtain a tourist visa from the U.S. consulate; depending on your country of origin, there may or may not be a charge attached (and you may or may not have to apply in person). To get the visa, along with a passport valid to at least 6 months from the end of your scheduled U.S. visit, you'll need to complete an application and submit a 1½-inch square photo. It's usually possible to obtain a visa within 24 hours, except during holiday periods or the summer rush.

For information about **U.S. visas,** go to http://travel.state.gov and click on "Visas."

PASSPORTS

To enter the United States, international visitors must have a valid passport that expires at least 6 months later than the scheduled end of your visit.

For Residents of Australia: You can pick up an application from your local post office or any branch of Passports Australia, but you must schedule an interview at the passport office to present your application materials. Call the **Australian Passport Information Service** at ☎ 131-232, or visit the government website at www.passports.gov.au.

For Residents of Canada: Passport applications are available at travel agencies throughout Canada or from the central **Passport Office,** Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (☎ 800/567-6868;

www.ppt.gc.ca). ***Note:*** Canadian children who travel must have their own passports. However, if you hold a valid Canadian passport, issued before December 11, 2001, that bears the name of your child, the passport remains valid for you and your child until it expires.

For Residents of Ireland: You can apply for a 10-year passport at the **Passport Office,** Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (☎ 01/671-1633; www.irlgov.ie/iveagh). Those under age 18 and over 65 must apply for a 123€ 1-year passport. You can also apply at 1A South Mall, Cork (☎ 021/272-525) or at most main post offices.

For Residents of New Zealand: You can pick up a passport application at any New Zealand Passports Office or download it from their website. Contact the **Passports Office** at ☎ 0800/225-050 in New Zealand or 04/474-8100, or log on to www.passports.govt.nz.

For Residents of the United Kingdom: To pick up an application for a standard 10-year passport (5-yr. passport for children under 16), visit your nearest passport office, major post office, or travel agency, or contact the **United Kingdom Passport Service** at ☎ 0870/521-0410. You can also search its website at www.ukpa.gov.uk.

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

No inoculations or vaccinations are required to enter the United States, unless you're arriving from an area that is suffering from an epidemic (cholera or yellow fever, in particular). A valid, signed prescription is required for those travelers in need of **syringe-administered medications** or medical treatment that involves **narcotics.** It is extremely important to obtain the correct documentation in these cases, as your medications could be confiscated, and if you are found to be carrying an illegal substance, you could be subject to significant penalties. Those who are **HIV-positive** may also require a special waiver in order to enter the country (as you will be asked on your visa application whether you're a carrier of any communicable diseases). The best thing to do is contact **AIDSinfo** (☎ 800/448-0440 or 301/519-6616; www.aidsinfonih.gov) for up-to-date information.

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

Strict regulations govern what can and can't be brought into the United States—and what you can take back home with you.

WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO NEW YORK

Every visitor more than 21 years of age may bring in, free of duty, the following: (1) 1 liter of wine or hard liquor; (2) 200 cigarettes, 100 cigars (but not from Cuba), or 3 pounds of smoking tobacco; and (3) $100 worth of gifts. These exemptions are offered to travelers who spend at least 72 hours in the United States and who have not claimed them within the preceding 6 months. It is altogether forbidden to bring into the country foodstuffs (particularly fruit, cooked meats, and canned goods) and plants (vegetables, seeds, tropical plants, and the

like). Foreign tourists may carry in or out up to $10,000 in U.S. or foreign currency with no formalities; larger sums must be declared to U.S. Customs on entering or leaving, which includes filing form CM 4790. For details regarding U.S. Customs and Border Protection, consult your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or **U.S. Customs** (☎ 202/927-1770; www.customs.ustreas.gov).

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM NEW YORK

For a clear summary of **Canadian** rules, write for the booklet *I Declare,* issued by the **Canada Border Services Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca).

For information, **U.K. citizens** contact **HM Customs & Excise** at ☎ 0845/010-9000 (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or the website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

A helpful brochure for **Australians,** available from Australian consulates or Customs offices, is *Know Before You Go.* For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ☎ 1300/363-263, or log on to www.customs.gov.au.

Most questions regarding **New Zealand** rules are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4.* For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs,** The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (☎ 04/473-6099 or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

FINDING A GOOD AIRFARE TO NEW YORK CITY

Though airfares have been rising incrementally within the United States, they still have not reached pre-9/11 levels, meaning that it's usually possible to snag a reasonable airfare into and out of New York City, one of the busiest gateways in the nation. Your strategy for getting that airfare should include the following steps:

- **Look at the low-fare carriers:** Airlines such as **JetBlue, Southwest, USA3000, AirTran, and ATA** will sometimes have better fares than the larger airlines, but they may not be searched if you go to a site such as Expedia. So use a search tool such as **Sidestep.com**, **Kayak.com**, or **Mobissimo.com**, which search airline sites directly, adding no service charges and often finding fares that the larger travel sites miss. The only airline these sites don't search is Southwest, which doesn't allow its fares to be searched by any outside entity. If you don't mind flying into Islip Airport (about 1½ hr. from the city), be sure to take a gander at the **Southwest site** (www.iflyswa.com) before booking. If you're flying from Europe into the United States, take a look at the fares from British Airways, American, Continental, Delta, United, Virgin Atlantic, Eurofly, Lufthansa, Icelandair, Martinair, and Aer Lingus, as these carriers tend to have the lowest rates for international travel. I've always found that **Mobissimo.com** and **CheapFlights.uk.com** are best for searching fares that don't originate in the U.S.
- **Fly when others don't, and take an itinerary the biz travelers don't want.** Those who fly midweek and midday, and who stay over a Saturday night, generally pay far less than those who fly at more popular times.
- **Book at the right time.** Sounds odd, but you can often save money by booking your seat at 3am. That's because unpaid-for reservations are flushed out of the system at midnight, and as airfares are based on supply and

demand, prices often sink when the system becomes aware of an increase in supply. Also consider booking on a Wednesday, traditionally the day when most airfare sales come out. Be sure to monitor such sites as Frommers.com and SmarterTravel.com, which highlight fare sales.

- **Try booking through a consolidator:** Those traveling to New York from another country may wish to use a consolidator or "bucket shop" to snag a ticket. These companies buy tickets in bulk, passing along the savings to their customers. If you reside in Europe, the best way to find one that services your area is to go to the website **www.cheapflights.co.uk**, which serves as a clearinghouse for bucket shops both large and small. Many will also advertise in the Sunday papers. Be careful, though: Some charge outrageous change fees, so read the fine print before you purchase your ticket. Bucket shops will not be useful for those flying within the U.S., as they are not generally able to undercut standard pricing on domestic travel.
- **Don't be particular about airports:** Three major airports serve New York City—LaGuardia, JFK, and Newark—and you should fly into whichever one has the lowest fare at the time you're booking. Yes, LaGuardia has a worse on-time record than the other two, and JFK and Newark are farther from the city, but none of those reasons should trump a low fare. You might even consider flying to Islip, which is Southwest's hub. It's farther from the city—90 minutes, as opposed to the 45 minutes to an hour at JFK or Newark—but if the price is right, you should go for it.

PACKAGE DEALS VS. BOOKING INDEPENDENTLY

To other destinations around the United States, booking a package (a travel product that bundles together airfare and hotel at one low price) can result in tremendous savings. Not so in Gotham. Because the city is booked solid nearly year-round, hotels here are less willing to play ball than their counterparts in, say Florida. Though such entities as US Airways Vacations, American Airlines Vacations, Site59, and others sell packages to New York, they rarely undercut what you would pay if you booked on your own.

A key to deciphering packages is to remember that they're always based on double occupancy, so be sure to double the costs and then subtract the airfares to get the lowdown on what you're actually paying for your room. The one exception to this rule may be packages that you create using such sites as Travelocity, Expedia, and Orbitz. Very occasionally, if you have a specific hotel in mind, you can save money this way. But it's a long shot.

Booking Hotel Rooms

There's an art to getting the best price on hotel rooms in New York City and it's discussed in chapter 3. For tips on booking online, go to p. 38; for tips on bargaining, go to p. 54; and for information on renting an apartment or staying in a private home, go to p. 21.

TRAVEL INSURANCE—DO YOU NEED IT?

When purchasing a big-ticket travel item—a guided tour, a cruise, a safari—it's essential to buy travel insurance. Many unforeseen circumstances can interrupt or cause you to cancel a trip, and with these types of trips, this could spell a large financial loss. But do you need it for your trip to NYC? Not necessarily. If you're purchasing the insurance to cover unforeseen medical expenses, lost luggage, or cancelled airfare, you may already be covered by your regular insurance if you're an American citizen. And hotel stays should never be insured, as hotels will usually allow you to cancel 24 hours in advance with no penalty (the only exception being if you book through a website such as Priceline that requires payment upfront for your stay).

So what might you want to insure? If you've booked an **apartment stay** and have had to put down a large deposit, that should be insured, as should **pricey airline tickets** and **any valuables you may be carrying with you** (as the airline will only pay up to $2,800 for lost luggage domestically, a lot less for foreign travel). If you're an **international visitor** coming to New York, you should probably invest in insurance that will **cover medical expenses.** Unlike most European nations, the United States does not have any form of socialized health care, meaning that hospitals and doctor visits can be extremely expensive. In nonemergency situations, both doctors and hospitals have the right to refuse care without advance payment or proof of coverage. (***Note:*** We're not utter barbarians; if you're in a life-or-death situation you won't be denied health care. But as with nonemergency care, the uninsured pay dearly for any services rendered—you'll just get the bill a bit later.) American citizens usually find that your regular insurance will cover you in New York, making additional health insurance unnecessary (the exception being certain HMOs, so check first).

If you do decide to buy insurance, you can easily parse the different policies by visiting the website **InsureMyTrip.com**, which compares the policies of all of the major companies. Or contact one of the following reputable companies directly:

- **Access America** (☎ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com)
- **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/807-3982; www.travelguard.com)
- **CSA Travel Protection** (☎ 800/873-9844; www.csatravelprotection.com)

TRAVELING FROM NEW YORK TO OTHER PARTS OF THE UNITED STATES

New York, as a major travel hub, is a convenient hopping-off point for other areas of the United States, even those located across the continent. Competition among carriers has kept fares from the Big Apple to most of the major gateways of the U.S. relatively cheap. To book airfares from New York to points west, north, and south, take a look at "Finding a Good Airfare to New York City," above.

The **USA Rail Pass** is the American equivalent to the Eurail Pass in Europe, allowing foreign visitors to travel extensively within the U.S. for one set (and fairly reasonable) rate. It's offered by **Amtrak** (www.amtrak.com) and is once again *only* for those living outside the United States (Canadians and Mexicans are not eligible). On the Amtrak site you'll find listings of representative agents in countries

around the globe; the passes must be purchased before entry into the United States. The passes are good for 5, 15, or 30 days of travel, and work either within a region (Northeast, East, or West) or, if you shell out more, throughout the entire United States. The cheapest pass is a 5-day pass for off-peak rides along the Northeast Corridor ($149); the most expensive offers 30 days of peak-time travel throughout the U.S. ($550). Go to the Amtrak site to see all the permutations in between.

For bus travel, an International Ameripass for international visitors is offered by **Greyhound/Trailways** (www.greyhound.com). Greyhound buses cover the United States, and the company's prices, both for individual trips and for the passes, are equivalent to what you'll find at Amtrak. The conditions aboard these buses aren't nearly as pleasant, however—cramped conditions, smelly bathrooms, and delays when traffic hits—making this a less pleasant option. I recommend looking at the train or plane first.

A better bus option—though only for those traveling on the East Coast—are the so-called **Chinatown shuttles.** Created by Chinese Americans as a means of getting between New York City and the cities of Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., they're open to everyone and offer rock-bottom prices. To Philadelphia, the average ride is just $12; for the other two cities you won't pay more than $20. There are now nearly a dozen little bus companies operating along these routes, and fare information plus bookings can be made on one well-designed agency site called **Ivy Media** (www.ivymedia.com). If you'd prefer to contact the companies directly (there is no price difference if you do so), the major players are **Fung Wa Transportation Inc.** (☎ 212/925-8889; www.fungwahbus.com; New York–Boston only), **Travel Pack USA** (☎ 617/338-8222; www.travelpackusa.com; New York–Boston only), and **New Century Travel** (www.2000coach.com; New York to Philly, Boston, and Washington, D.C.).

So what's the catch? Why so cheap? It all comes down to the language barrier. The buses are operated by Chinese speakers, who sometimes have a limited grasp of English, so it can be frustrating to try to communicate with the drivers and the folks selling the seats. Other than that, the buses are clean and quick (if the traffic's with you), and you often get to see a kung fu flick as you travel. What could be better?

HOW DO I GET TO (& FROM) THE AIRPORT? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS . . .

Unlike other major world cities, a series of shortsighted and highly political decisions have left New York with no easy, logical way to get to and from two of its three major airports (www.panynj.gov, for information on all three airports). Instead, travelers are left to battle gridlocked traffic in cars, taxis, and private shuttle buses. Those who choose public transportation end up jumping two or three trains or buses simply to get from Midtown Manhattan to JFK or LaGuardia. The picture has changed recently to Newark, so I'll thank the transportation gods by sharing the good news about that airport first.

GETTING TO & FROM NEWARK AIRPORT CHEAPLY

When I'm talking about good news here, I'm talking about AirTrain. That's the transit system, created half a dozen years ago, that quickly and efficiently connects

Other Airport Transportation Choices

If you're overburdened with luggage, convenience may trump cost or speed. You should take either a **taxi, private car service,** or **shuttle bus.** Of the three methods, I would go with the first two rather than the latter because, although such services as **SuperShuttle** (☎ 212/258-3826; www.supershuttle.com) do pick you up at your hotel or at the airport, you waste a lot of time hitting the hotels of other travelers before getting to your final destination (a particularly hair-raising prospect if you're late for a flight). Price-wise, shuttles only make sense for solo travelers; once you double the cost for a couple, taxis and private cars become cheaper (see chart for pricing).

Taxis can be hailed at any Manhattan corner, though they can be scarce all day in Harlem, and citywide between the hours of 4pm and 6pm, when the combination of rush hour and the turnover of drivers' shifts overwhelms the system. They often come out a dollar or two cheaper (see "Airport Transportation Options," below for costs) than most car services.

Plan-ahead types go for private limousines, which guarantee that your car will be there when you need it. In general, one fare will cover up to four people. After that, the company will insist that you take a larger car, and the price may increase so substantially that taxis may make more sense (a large van that can hold up to eight people will cost about $100 to JFK; in this case, two taxis will be significantly cheaper). If you're hiring a car for airport pick-up, the dispatcher will ask if you want the driver to meet you inside the terminal, at the baggage claim area. This will be significantly more costly than a curbside pick-up, but you'll have the security of knowing that the driver will be there right when you pick up your bags. If you decide on curbside pick-up, you have to call the dispatcher when you arrive and then may have to wait anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes for your car. Another key factor with limousines is that you must book 24 hours in advance, especially if you're planning to use a car in the morning hours. Services do sell out, so call ahead.

Dependable limousine companies include:

- **Tel Aviv** (☎ 800/222-9888 or 212/777-7777; www.telavivlimousine.com; LaGuardia $31, JFK or Newark $46).
- **Carmel Limousine** (☎ 800/9-CARMEL or 212/666-6666; www.carmellimo.com; La Guardia $28–$31, Newark $43–$45, JFK $40–$46). The prices in the lower range are from the airport into Manhattan.

each of the terminals at **Newark Liberty International Airport** (about 16 miles from Midtown Manhattan) with nearby Newark Pennsylvania Station, via a shuttle that leaves the airport every 3 minutes at most times of the day. From there, travelers can jump New Jersey Transit or Amtrak to **Pennsylvania Station** (from

Seventh to Eighth aves., between 31st and 33rd sts.; A, E, C, 1, 2, 3), a speedy 20-min. ride that costs just $14 on New Jersey Transit, about double that on Amtrak ($24–$28). Those going in the opposite direction can take one of the thrice-hourly trains from New York's Penn Station to New Jersey's for exactly the same amount of money (be sure to buy your tickets at a kiosk to avoid the $5 on-train surcharge). The stations are pleasant and well-marked, the ride a quick one (in fact, it's hard to beat the speed of the AirTrain in a taxi or shuttle bus, thanks to the ugly traffic between Manhattan and the airport).

Those traveling from downtown Manhattan have the option of catching the **PATH Train** (Sixth Ave., at either Christopher St., 9th St., 23rd St., or 34th St.; or at the World Trade Center), taking it to Newark's Pennsylvania Station, and connecting there to the airport. The only real difference here is that travelers pay both at the PATH station ($1.50) and again for the AirTrain to the airport ($5.50). And while the PATH is a direct shot from the World Trade Center station to Newark's Penn Station, those traveling from the other stops will have to take the train to Journal Square and then change there for Newark Penn Station. It's still a quick and inexpensive method of getting to the airport.

I'll also mention a company called **Olympia Airport Express** (☎ 212/964-6233; www.olympiabus.com), which operates buses to and from Grand Central Station, Port Authority, and Pennsylvania Station. It charges $13 for one-way tickets, $22 round-trip. In general, you'll get a quicker and cheaper ride with AirTrain, but if you're traveling solo or have a lot of luggage and will be staying at a hotel near one of the drop-off points, it may be worth booking.

GETTING TO & FROM JFK

Like Newark, John F. Kennedy International Airport (known better as JFK) also has an AirTrain system, but it's not nearly as quick or easy to use. In this case, riders take the subway (either the A to Howard Beach or the E, J, or Z to Jamaica Station), and then scramble wildly trying to find the AirTrain (the signage is poor). With the subway fare and the AirTrain fare, this option costs $7 total. It's also possible to take the Long Island Rail Road from Pennsylvania Station to Jamaica Station, but once again, it's a difficult path to navigate and it will be

Surviving the Airports

After you factor in travel time, do a bit of research to find out how long it will take you to get to through security lines at the airport. The government maintains a helpful website at waittime.tsa.dhs.gov that displays average and maximum waiting times at all U.S. airports, terminal by terminal, during a 4-hour time frame, based on data collected in the previous few weeks at each airport.

It's also a good idea to call a day before your flight to confirm your seat. Be sure to inquire at that time if your flight is overbooked. If that's the case, tack an extra 20 minutes onto your "getting to the airport" time just to make sure you get a seat on the plane.

Airport Transportation Options

from Midtown Manhattan

Airports	Avg. Cost by Public Transportation	Avg. Travel Time by AirTrain	Frequency of AirTrain Service	Avg. Cost by New York Airport Service Express Bus	Avg. Cost by SuperShuttle	Avg. Cost by Taxi	Avg. Cost by Car Service	Avg. Drive Time
JFK	$7–$13***	70–90 min.**	Every 2–4 minutes from 6am–11pm; every 8 minutes otherwise	$15	$17–$19 per adult	$45 from airport, $44–$50 to airport* for 1–4 passengers	$46, plus toll and tip, for 1–4 passengers	45–60 min.
LaGuardia	$2, but no AirTrain	N/A	N/A	$10–$12	$15 per adult	$20–$24	$20–$24	20–35 min.
Newark	$7–$14	30–35 min.	Every 2–4 minutes from 6am–11pm; every 8 minutes otherwise	$13	$15–$19	$50	$46, plus toll and tip	35–55 min.

**These figures are based on the flat fare that applies to trips from JFK, and an estimate of the nonregulated rates to that airport.*

***The shorter trip is via the Long Island Rail Road; the longer one is via the subway.*

****Seven dollars is the combined subway and AirTrain fare; $13 is for those who take the Long Island Rail Road.*

pricier at $12. Another dissuasion: The ride averages a stiff 90 minutes thanks to the vagaries of subway service this far out in Queens.

A better option is the **New York Airport Service** (☎ 718/875-8200; www.nyairportservice.com), a privately owned bus company that drives passengers from the Port Authority Bus Terminal (42nd St. and Eighth Ave.), a spot just above Grand Central Terminal (at Park Ave., between 41st and 42nd sts.), and a scattering of Midtown hotels between 27th and 59th streets, for a reasonable $13 one-way, $23 round-trip. Its buses leave every 30 minutes, 5:10am through 10pm. On the downside: Because it takes so long to load the buses, the company tells passengers to expect a commute of between 60 and 80 minutes from the airport to their home terminals.

GETTING TO & FROM LAGUARDIA CHEAPLY

The nearest airport to the city (about 8 miles from Manhattan), LaGuardia also has the worst panoply of options for public transportation: three turtle-slow public buses (they've been known to clock in at 100 minutes for a trip that should take 45 at most). Your time is not worth the savings you may garner. Instead, turn to the **New York Airport Service** (see above). It charges a reasonable $12 one-way,

$21 round-trip—a good deal for solo travelers (though couples may simply want to bite the bullet and take a cab).

MONEY MATTERS

It's rare to go more than 4 blocks without finding an **ATM or bank machine** in Manhattan. They are ubiquitous—in banks, of course, as well as in delis and some grocery and department stores. For those changing a foreign currency, ATMs will give you a much better exchange rate than the various Currency Exchanges near Times Square and scattered in other areas of town. Do be aware, however, of shifting fees. In general you'll pay the most at nonbank ATMs (sometimes as much as $3 per transaction), so always try to find a bank first before resorting to the little machine at the corner deli (which will be marked outside by a small hanging sign stating simply ATM). Most banks charge between $1 and $2 to nonaccountholders.

Traveler's checks will elicit a confused stare from many waiters and shop clerks. With ATMs so common, hardly anyone uses these little slips of paper anymore and there can be significant fees attached to their exchange at some banks. If you want the security of a traveler's check with ease of use, I'd recommend getting one of the new check cards, available from American Express. These cards have a preset limit on them, so if one gets stolen, the thief cannot wipe out your bank account or run up an ugly credit card bill. And like traveler's checks, American Express promises that lost cards can be replaced within 24 hours. Go to www.americanexpress.com for more information.

Credit cards are widely accepted, though certain smaller stores and restaurants don't accept American Express because of the fees it charges merchants. In general, however, Visa, Mastercard, American Express, and Discover can be used in hotels, restaurants, shops, and even subway ticket vending machines. Most restaurants will post the names of the credit cards they accept on their front door; shops, hotels, and some restaurants don't, so you'll need to ask. A $15 minimum is often attached to credit card payment, so inquire about that as well.

HEALTH & SAFETY

In 2005, the FBI ranked New York City as the safest large city in the United States. I have lived here my entire life and have been the victim of a crime only once: In the mid-'80s, when the city had a much higher crime rate, my wallet was lifted out of a coat pocket on a crowded subway. Of the friends and family I have in the city (and there are dozens), only a handful have had a firsthand experience of crime in the last 5 years, and without exception there's been no violence in the encounter.

All that being said, this is still a large city with all types of people, so it's important to be vigilant. Never carry large amounts of money on your person or a wallet in the back pocket of a backpack, where it can be easily filched. Although you don't need to resort to a money belt, you should keep your passport and any other valuable documents in your hotel's safe rather than on your person (if you're traveling with a passport, you may also want to photocopy it, so you'll have the necessary information in case it should be lost and you must have it replaced at your consulate). Women should keep their purses in sight at all times.

What Things Cost

Although New Yorkers pay far less than the citizens of Tokyo, Osaka, and London (respectively ranked as the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd most expensive cities in the world in 2005) for everyday goods and services, prices here can be shocking. Here are the average costs or range of costs for some of the items and services you may need to purchase in the course of your trip.

Subway or bus ride	$2
Taxi ride (Midtown to Uptown museums)	$8
Bagel	50¢
Cup of regular coffee	$1–$2
Sandwich in a deli	$3–$5
Hot dog	$1.50
Hot pretzel	$1
Diner breakfast	$4–$7
Lunch in cheap restaurant	$5–$7
Lunch in moderate–expensive restaurant	$12–$30
Dinner in cheap restaurant	$7–$12
Dinner in moderate–expensive restaurant	$13–$40
Bottle of domestic beer in a bar	$4–$5
Bottle of imported beer in a bar	$5–$10
Cocktail in a bar	$6–$12
Bottle of water	$1–$2
Average museum entrance fee	$11
Full-price Broadway show ticket	$95
Discount Broadway show ticket	$45–$65
Standing-room Broadway show ticket	$15
Movie ticket	$10.50
Walking tour	$12
Souvenir T-shirt	$8–$15
Tube of toothpaste	$4.99
Package of diapers (27 count)	$12.99
Contact lens solution (12 oz.)	$4.99

Along with pickpockets, scam artists remain a problem. The most common scams involve a stranger asking for the use of your ATM card, briefly they say, until they can access their funds. Don't fall for it. You will also most likely be approached by panhandlers asking for money. These unfortunate souls are not in any way dangerous, and if you want to be generous, the best thing to do is to buy them a bit of food because gifts of cash may go to feed a drug habit.

As for where in the city you can wander, with the exceptions of certain areas of Harlem, the rest of Manhattan is safe both day and night. This includes such formerly iffy neighborhoods as the Meat-Packing District, Times Square, the Lower East Side, and Alphabet City; all major nightlife areas now are teeming with partiers most nights of the week (there's safety in numbers!). You must be more careful in the outer boroughs, especially the Bronx, and some of the more far-flung areas of Brooklyn and Queens. Get full directions before you venture out of Manhattan, because it's much easier to get lost in the boroughs, which do not have a grid-based street system.

As for the subway: The unexpected benefit of the terrorist threats to Manhattan has been an even safer subway system. It is now rife with undercover cops and safe to ride in Manhattan until 1am. After 1am (or if you're in one of the other boroughs, after about 10pm), you may want to take the precaution of standing in the areas marked by yellow signs stating **DURING OFF HOURS STAND HERE**. Make your way, at those times, to the most crowded cars, where muggings are very unlikely to occur. One other subway note: Stand well back from the edge of the platform, as you don't want to accidentally fall onto the tracks (this is not an uncommon occurrence—in 2005, two people per week fell onto the tracks, so be careful).

HEALTH CONCERNS

If you develop any kind of illness while in New York, your best bet is to talk with the desk clerk at your hotel and ask him or her to recommend a dentist or a doctor. You'll probably receive better care that way than calling an 800-number for referrals. Doctors in New York City almost never make house calls; most only work between 10am and 6pm, but an increasing number are keeping office hours on Saturdays and evenings, to handle the overload of patients. Certain hospitals also have affiliated nonemergency drop-in health-care centers, such as **DOCS at New York Healthcare** (55 E. 34th St., between Park and Madison aves.; ☎ 800/673-3627; Mon–Thurs 8am–8pm, Fri 8am–7pm, Sat 9am–3pm, and Sun 9am–2pm; 6 to 33rd St.).

If you have an acute need to see a doctor at a time of day when regular physicians aren't seeing patients, you'll have to go to a local hospital for care. Again, ask the clerk at your hotel for the nearest emergency room or, if you cannot make it there under your own steam, call ☎ **911,** which is also the number to call in the United States for emergency help from the police and fire department.

One word on prescription medications: It is crucial that you pack your prescription medications in their original containers, and bring them in your carry-on luggage. Be sure, also, to bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you run out or misplace your pills. If you need a prescription filled during your stay, **Duane Reade** operates three branches with 24-hour pharmacies at:

- 224 W. 57th St., between Seventh Ave. and Broadway; ☎ 212/541-9708; 1, A, C, B, D, N, Q, R to 57th St.
- 253 W. 72nd St., between Broadway and West End Ave.; ☎ 212/580-0497; 1, 2, 3 to 72nd St.
- 1279 Third Ave., at 74th St.; ☎ 212/744-2668; 6 to 77th St.

PACKING

The most important item in your suitcase will be a pair of very, very comfortable shoes because your dogs are gonna be barking! This is a walking city, and what with getting from place to place and trudging through the marble halls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the American Museum of Natural History, a springy, supportive pair of shoes is essential (you may want to bring two pairs to increase your feet ease). Other than that, fill your suitcase with what pleases you most at home: Very few actual New Yorkers have the budget or time to dress like the ladies on *Sex and the City,* and unless you plan on going to the theater, the opera, or a very fancy restaurant, casual clothes should suffice. If you plan on going out clubbing, turn to p. 294 to read my advice on the specialized "club clothes" you're going to need to get past the velvet ropes.

Dressing appropriately for the weather is also key, so be sure to check the chart at the top of this chapter for the average temperatures at various times of the year. Those visiting in the fall and spring months (mid-Sept to mid-Nov, and mid-Mar to mid-May) are advised to bring clothes that you can layer, as a balmy afternoon can turn chilly once the sun goes down. In winter, you're going to want a woolen hat, muffler, gloves, and a heavy coat—the wind rushing between the city's buildings will often make the day feel colder than it is, especially if you're visiting the Financial District, the Statue of Liberty, or any area near water. Summer can get sultry, so be sure to pack sandals, shorts, and shirts in fabrics that breathe.

SPECIALIZED TRAVEL RESOURCES

With one of the most diverse populations in the United States, the Big Apple is welcoming to visitors of all types. But because certain visitors have special needs (and also get special perks), I want to address these groups directly with a few choice words of advice.

ADVICE FOR FAMILY TRAVELERS

Though its reputation would have you believe otherwise, New York is actually an ultra-kid-friendly destination (and I say that both as someone who grew up here and as a mother of two young daughters). Most of the "adult attractions"—the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Intrepid, and so forth—offer full-blown programs to make their offerings palatable to the younger set. Playgrounds dot Manhattan, the only exception being Midtown, a woefully parkless area (though Bryant Park on 42nd St., off Sixth Ave., now has a merry-go-round, if not a playground). And there are dozens of special events held around the city each week that are specifically for children. To learn about these performances and festivals, take a look at Friday's ***New York Times*** (the back of the "Arts" section), or pick up ***Time Out*** at any newsstand and scan the "Around Town" section for the activities with a kids symbol next to them.

When planning your own visit with kids, I recommend choosing accommodations on the Upper West Side. This will place you near Central Park, the Children's Museum, the Museum of Natural History, and dozens of child-friendly restaurants. (How can you tell that a restaurant wants your kids? Call in advance and ask about highchairs and kids' menus; those that have them are saying "Come

on in." Those that don't should be visited only by parents with exceptionally well-behaved offspring. You should also check out those restaurants that I've marked with a Kids icon in chapter 4.) Consider renting an apartment rather than staying in a hotel. It may afford you more privacy, as you may not have to share a room with the kids, and you'll have access to a kitchen so you'll save on restaurant meals (that may also save your sanity if your child is a picky eater).

Remember that children under 12 receive discounted or free admission to nearly every museum in the city and can get discounted movie tickets. If they're under 6 (or look it), they can ride the subways and buses for free. Very few hotels will charge extra for kids under 12 to share your room, and a handful (see chapter 3) extend that freebie up to the age of 18. The only place your kids will not get a discount is at Broadway shows, most of which do not admit children under the age of 5.

If you're hoping for a night or afternoon away from the kids, ask at the front desk if your hotel can provide a babysitter or has a list of reliable babysitters (better yet, ask before you book). Those staying in an apartment or a hotel without such a service should contact **The Baby Sitters' Guild** (☎ 212/682-0277; www.babysittersguild.com). The service is not cheap ($20–$30 per hour, with a 4-hr. minimum, depending on the ages and number of children), but the sitters from this organization are veritable Mary Poppinses (they'll even take your kids out on the town, if you wish), and are licensed, insured, and bonded.

ADVICE FOR TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Hotels

As in many older cities, the levels of accessibility in New York can vary greatly from hotel to hotel. In the course of researching this guide, I found second-floor hotels without any elevators whatsoever, as well as other lodgings with bathrooms a step up from the bedroom floors. I've noted in my reviews in chapter 3 which lodgings are inaccessible; by and large, most of the places you'll find listed in this guide *do* provide accommodations that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you'd like to research other accommodations that are guaranteed accessible, visit the website www.access-able.com, which has a poorly organized but still useful database of accommodations in the state of New York. You can also e-mail **SATH** (Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality; info@sath.org) with any questions on hotels, and the staff there will get back to you . . . eventually (it's understaffed) with what they know about the accessibility of the hotel in question.

Restaurants

Restaurants are more of a mixed bag when it comes to accessibility, due to space constraints. Many will be too small to admit a wheelchair; some have basement bathroom facilities, accessible only by stairs; others require diners to climb a few steps up to the entrance of the restaurant. If you're a wheelchair user or have limited mobility, I strongly recommend calling in advance to make sure the restaurant you've picked is fully accessible.

Theaters

Every Broadway theater, and most Off-Broadway theaters, now have spaces set aside for persons in wheelchairs. These are limited in number, however, so it's

important to book well in advance to ensure that you get a spot at the show you wish to see. Before you book your tickets, be sure to visit the website of **Hospital Audiences** (www.hospaud.org, click on the "Access Guide"). This superb resource will tell you which theaters offer a discount for wheelchair seating (some put aside two spots at a lower rate), which ones have accessible toilets, how many folding arm-rest seats are available, which shows offer infrared hearing devices and signed performances, the locations of passenger loading zones, and much more.

Museums

In New York, the general rule is: the larger the museum, the more extensive the facilities for persons with disabilities. For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art offers free rental of standard and extra-wide wheelchairs at all of its coat-check stands, regular sign-language and touch tours for the deaf and blind, attended elevators, and accessible bathrooms and water fountains. Go to a smaller museum, such as the American Craft Museum, and there will be fewer special services (sign language tours available only with advance reservation, unattended elevators, and so on), but on the whole, you'll find that even the smaller venues are accessible and adept at handling the needs of travelers with disabilities. Again, the best place to research the conditions and offerings at each museum is the excellent Access Guide at the Hospital Audiences website (see above).

TRANSPORTATION

Perhaps the most difficult issue for travelers with mobility impairments is how to get around the city. Currently, there is only one car service, **A Ride for All** (☎ 718/706-7433), that specializes in transportation around Manhattan and from the airports for persons with wheelchairs. Its large vans can accommodate two to three wheelchairs or scooters, plus three additional riders. Costs are $50 per van (not per person) from LaGuardia, $90 from JFK and Newark, and between $30 and $40 for most rides around the city. Advance reservations are a must, and if you can't obtain those (it can be difficult), **Seville Car and Limousine** (800/558-3611; sevillecar@aol.com) has one specially retooled "London Taxi" with a ramp for wheelchair use and swing-out seats. It charges a flat $65 rate per hour and then adds a half-hour's travel time to that, each way; so any ride will cost at least $130 (try A Ride for All first).

All New York City **buses** are wheelchair accessible—the buses "kneel" to let on passengers, and also have wheelchair lifts and special sections where a chair can be secured while the bus is in motion. Persons with disabilities pay just $1 for rides (half-price). **Subways** are more of a problem. While a handful of stations have added elevators in recent years, the vast majority of stations do not have elevators and require that a rider be able to tackle one and sometimes two flights of stairs to the subway platforms.

Taxis can also be difficult—of the 13,000 on the streets, only 29 are designed to be fully accessible. And while most will have the trunk room to accommodate a foldable wheelchair, they are sometimes less than willing to pick up people in wheelchairs or those with guide dogs, even though by law they are required to carry them. The lack of parking makes **renting a van** and driving around the city a less than ideal option, but if you feel like it would be the most convenient

transportation method for you, **Wheelchair Getaways** (☎ 800/344-5005; www.wheelchair-getaways.com) rents vans with wheelchair lifts and other helpful features.

ADVICE FOR GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

In truth, gay and lesbian travelers need very little special advice when it comes to New York City. With one of the largest and most politically active gay populations in the world, and dozens of gay bars and clubs (see chapter 10 for more on the city's nightlife options), you should feel welcomed and accepted in the Big Apple. After all, this is where the Broadway musical was born, right?

Traditionally, the gay community of New York has been centered around Christopher Street in the West Village, but in the last decade it's expanded to Chelsea. If you're a bar-hopper, these are the two areas you'll want to explore, though there are gay bars in every neighborhood of Manhattan, just as there are gay people in every neighborhood. For more complete listings of bars and special events than you'll find in this tome, go into any gay bar or store and pick up a free copy of the ***HX*** (www.hx.com) or ***Next*** (www.nextnyc.com). Much of the same information is available via websites. Another good resource is ***Time Out*** (available on newsstands), which has a large section devoted to gay and lesbian events and festivities.

ADVICE FOR SENIORS

What seniors must remember in this pricey city is that age has it privileges and that there are many discounts available to oldsters—you just have to ask (and show a picture ID if you look particularly spry). Many of the large hotel chains offer discounts to those over 60, and movie theaters and museums do as well. Seniors can also get half-price rides on the MTA's subway and city buses ($1), though in order to do so, you'll have to trek to Brooklyn to 370 Jay St. (Ⓐ, Ⓒ, Ⓕ, ❷, ❸, ❹, ❺ to Borough Hall; weekdays 9am–5pm) to prove you're over 65 and pick up a reduced-fare MetroCard (in other words, it's probably not worth your time). It's only at the theater—where seniors often make up 80% of the audience—that there are no markdowns.

Those who belong to **AARP** (601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 24009; ☎ 888/687-2277; www.aarp.org) get even more discounts, especially at hotels, so start waving around that card if you have it. Anyone over 50 can join.

In terms of meals, New York does not have the same abundance of "early bird specials" that you'll find in cities largely populated by seniors. What it does have are heaping portions, and my father, Arthur Frommer (now over age 70), insists that with age comes a diminishment in appetite. His advice to seniors, which I pass along here, is to share food: One appetizer and one entree are what he and Roberta, his wife, have when they go out to dine, and they leave perfectly satisfied.

STAYING WIRED

In 2005, one of the candidates for the position of Public Advocate for New York City centered his campaign around the issue of Internet access. He felt that every area of the city should become a "hot zone" for WiFi, from the subways to Central Park to the public libraries. He lost.

But his crusade is gathering steam nonetheless as WiFi pops up in the most unexpected places (along with trees and fountains, a number of the smaller parks in the city—Bowling Green Park, City Hall Park, Union Square Park and Bryant Park, to be precise—have sprouted hot spots). For those traveling with your own computers, it's nearly impossible to walk more than a few blocks without encountering a signal. WiFi is now a given at every coffeehouse in the city; at all of the McDonald's, Kinkos, and Cosi's; at public libraries (filtered access); and in the lobbies of the more expensive hotels. You just plunk your laptop down and hook in to the network—nobody will check to see if you're staying at the hotel or have purchased a cup of java.

At most hotels around the city, Internet access in your room is charged at a standard $9.95 per day. Depending on the hotel, this will be WiFi, dial-up, or a choice of either.

Laptop-less travelers will also have easy access to your e-mail by visiting any of the following locations:

- **All public libraries** (www.nypl.org; hours vary by location, but are roughly Tues–Sun 10am–5pm) offer free Internet access, though there may be a wait for a computer.
- **The Times Square Visitors Center** (1560 Broadway, between 46th and 47th sts.; ☎ 212/768-1560; daily 8am–8pm) has terminals where you can send e-mail free, courtesy of Yahoo. (Don't buy theater tickets here though; the prices are steep.)
- **easyInternetCafe** (235 W. 42nd St., between Seventh and Eighth aves.; ☎ 212/398-0775; www.easyeverything.com; 7am–1am daily), part of the European empire (planes, cruise ships, and Internet cafes), is the largest Internet cafe in the world, with dozens of flatscreen computers featuring speedy T-3 connections. You need only $1 to get online; the cost per minute fluctuates depending on the time of day. It's not expensive, though; in fact, this is the cheapest Internet cafe in the city.
- **Cyber-café** actually has two locations in the city (250 W. 49th St., between Broadway and Eighth Ave.; and 705 Eighth Ave., between 44th and 45th sts.; ☎ 212/333-4109; www.cyber-cafe.com; Mon–Fri 8am–11pm, Sat–Sun 11am–11pm). Along with lickety-split connectivity, these cafes offer printing services, fax machines, CD/DVD burners, digital camera multichip readers, and more. Prices are higher than at easyInternet, starting at $6.40 per half-hour and ticking off an additional $3.20 for every 15 minutes after that. Those planning to be online for a long time can buy slightly less expensive prepaid cards.
- **Cyberfelds at Village Copier** (30 E. 13th St., off University Place; ☎ 212/647-8830; Mon–Fri 8am–midnight, Sat–Sun 10am–8pm) is a friendly cafe located above a copy shop. You'll always find an empty space among the dozen or so terminals here. There's a $2.50 minimum for 15 minutes; every additional 15 is charged at $2.50.
- **International Computer Café** (247 E. 57th St.; ☎ 212/872-1704; www.nycomputercafe.freeservers.com; Mon–Fri 8am–11pm, Sat 10am–11pm, Sun 11am–11pm) lures patrons with fax machines, printing and copying service, low international phone rates, and Internet access ($3 for every 15 min.).

- **Kinkos** (multiple locations around the city; www.kinkos.com) is New York's largest chain of office service stores. So that means you won't find a location in Times Square or in most areas of the Village or Harlem, but everywhere else is fair game. Access costs 30¢ per minute, with an hour going for a flat $15.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS & FILMS

If you have the time and the stamina, there's no better book ever written about the history of New York than *Gotham* by Edwin G. Burroughs and Mike Wallace. A thoroughly gripping, complex, and fascinating portrait, it's literally the length of the N.Y. telephone book and therefore (unfortunately) too hefty for most time-constrained travelers to get through (and certainly too big to lug with you on your vacation). If you want to own it as a reference work at home, there's none that can match it.

Shorter histories that cover only one small section of New York's past, but are still enjoyable, thought-provoking reads include:

- *Great Fortune* by Daniel Okrent, the epic account of the creation of Rockefeller Center.
- *Low Life,* Luc Sante's rollicking tale of the crooks, prostitutes, scam artists, and other shady types who kept things interesting in Victorian Gotham.
- *Waterfront,* Philip Lopate's lively and insight-packed memoir/history of the waterfront of the city.

For good movies and TV series that focus on the city, the PBS television series *New York* (available at some video stores), a 12-hour epic featuring extensive interviews with the authors of *Gotham,* as well as many other historians, is superb, but once again a mammoth undertaking. Other movies that will teach you a bit about New York include Martin Scorsese's flawed *Gangs of New York,* which nonetheless provides a splendid snapshot of the underworld of New York in the 1860s; Scorsese's *Age of Innocence,* which details upper-class life à la Edith Wharton, during the Victorian era; and his *Taxi Driver,* a searing portrayal of New York during one of the city's most troubled periods, the 1970s. Woody Allen is also, of course, a top New York portraitist; his films *Manhattan, Hannah and Her Sisters*, and *Annie Hall* have all rightly been called valentines to the city. Other fun movies filmed in New York that will stoke you for the trip include the musical *On the Town* (the first movie musical to shoot on location), *Breakfast at Tiffany's, Rosemary's Baby, The Way We Were, Network, Saturday Night Fever, Hair, Arthur, Tootsie, Splash, After Hours, Desperately Seeking Susan, Crossing Delancey, Working Girl, When Harry Met Sally, The Fisher King, In America,* and *Maria Full of Grace.* Rent one before you come, and then look for locations as you wander round the city.

For TV portraits of the city (some filmed in Los Angeles or Canada, but true to the spirit of New York) you may want to tune in to: the entire *Law and Order* series, which is actually filmed in New York, as well as *NYPD Blue, CSI: New York,* and *The Equalizer.* For noncrime shows (which, with plunging crime rates, may not be as accurate as they once were), I'd recommend *Sex and the City, Seinfeld,* and, for a touch of nostalgia, *Taxi* and *All in the Family.*

The ABCs of New York

Area Codes You must use the prefix "1" before you dial any number within New York City or to anywhere else in the United States or Canada. There are now two area codes for Manhattan (212 and 646) as well as two in the outer boroughs (718 and 347). Many cellphones and pagers have the area code 917. To dial outside of the United States or Canada, dial 011 before the telephone number. Calls to numbers that begin with an "800," "877," or "888" area code are toll-free.

ATMS & Currency Exchange See "Money Matters," earlier in this chapter.

Business Hours Offices are generally open on weekdays between 9am and 5pm, while banks tend to close at 3pm. A scattering of banks throughout the city are now open between the hours of 9am and 1pm on Saturday. Typically, stores open between 9am and 10am and close between 6 and 7pm Monday through Saturday, with a number of department stores extending their hours on Thursday until 9pm. On Sunday, stores generally open at 11am and rarely stay open later than 6pm.

Drinking Laws The legal age for the purchase and consumption of any sort of alcohol is 21. Proof of age is often requested at liquor stores, bars, clubs, and restaurants, so be sure to carry photo ID with you at all times. It's illegal to carry open containers of alcohol in any public area that isn't zoned for alcohol consumption, and the police can ticket you on the spot.

Electricity The United States uses 110–120 volts AC (60 cycles), compared to the 220–240 volts AC (50 cycles) that is standard in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. If your small appliances use 220–240 volts, be sure to buy an adaptor and voltage converter before you leave home, as these are very difficult to find in the United States.

Embassies & Consulates All embassies are located in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. Some consulates are located in major U.S. cities, and most nations have a mission to the United Nations in New York City. If your country isn't listed below, call for directory information in Washington, D.C. (☎ **202/555-1212**) or log on to **www.embassy.org/embassies**.

The embassy of **Australia** is at 1601 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036 (☎ **202/797-3000;** www.austemb.org). There are consulates in New York, Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

The embassy of **Canada** is at 501 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001 (☎ **202/682-1740;** www.canadianembassy.org). Other Canadian consulates are in Buffalo (New York), Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, and Seattle.

The embassy of **Ireland** is at 2234 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (☎ **202/462-3939;** www.irelandemb.org). Irish consulates are in Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and other cities. See website for complete listing.

The embassy of **New Zealand** is at 37 Observatory Circle NW, Washington, DC 20008 (☎ **202/328-4800;** www.nzemb.org). New Zealand consulates are in Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, and Seattle.

The embassy of the **United Kingdom** is at 3100 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (☎ **202/588-7800;** www.britainusa.com). Other British consulates are in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Emergencies Call ☎ 911 for the police, to report a fire, or to get an ambulance. If you have a medical emergency that does not require an ambulance, you should be able to walk into the nearest hospital emergency room (see "Hospitals," below).

Holidays Banks close on the following holidays: January 1 (New Year's), the third Monday in January (Martin Luther King, Jr., Day), the third Monday in February (Presidents Day), the last Monday in May (Memorial Day), July 4 (Independence Day), the first Monday in September (Labor Day), the second Monday in October (Veterans Day), the fourth Thursday in November (Thanksgiving Day), and December 25. The handful of museums that are open on Monday tend to stay open on holidays, though almost all museums in the city close for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's (the exception on Christmas being the city's three Jewish museums).

Hospitals The following hospitals are well regarded and have emergency rooms that are open 24 hours:

Downtown: New York Downtown Hospital (170 William St., between Beekman and Spruce sts.; ☎ 212/312-5063); **St. Vincent's Medical Center** (153 W. 11th St., at Seventh Ave.; ☎ 212/604-7000); **Beth Israel Medical Center** (First Ave. and 16th St.; ☎ 212/420-2000)

Midtown: Bellevue Hospital Center (462 First Ave., at 27th St.; ☎ 212/562-4141); **New York Medical Center** (560 First Ave., at 33rd St.; ☎ 212/263-3700); **Roosevelt Hospital** (425 W. 59th St., between Ninth and Tenth aves.; ☎ 212/523-6800)

Upper West Side: St. Luke's Hospital Center (Amsterdam Ave. and 113th St.; ☎ 212/523-3335) and **Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center** (622 W. 168th St., between Broadway and Fort Washington Ave.; ☎ 212/305-3500)

Upper East Side: New York Presbyterian Hospital (525 E. 68th St., at York Ave.); **Lenox Hill Hospital** (100 E. 77th St., between Park and Lexington aves.; ☎ 212/434-2000); **Mount Sinai Medical Center** (Fifth Ave., at 100th St.; ☎ 212/241-6500).

Libraries Branches of the New York Public Library are scattered throughout the city and usually offer free Internet service. For a listing of branches (and their hours) go **to www.nypl.org**.

Mail At press time, domestic postage rates were 24¢ for a postcard and 39¢ for a letter. For international mail, a first-class letter of up to 1 ounce costs 84¢ (63¢ to Canada and Mexico); a first-class postcard costs 75¢ (55¢ to Canada and Mexico); and a preprinted postal aerogramme costs 75¢. For more information go to **www.usps.com** and click on "Calculate Postage."

If you aren't sure what your address will be in the United States, mail can be sent to you, in your name, c/o General Delivery at New York's main post office (on Eighth Ave. between 32nd and 33rd sts.). (Call ☎ **800/275-8777** for information on the nearest post office.) The addressee must pick up mail in person and must produce proof of identity (driver's license, passport, and so on). Most post offices will hold your mail for up to 1 month, and are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, Saturday from 9am to 3pm.

Always include zip codes when mailing items in the U.S. If you don't know your zip code, visit **www.usps.com/zip4**.

Newspapers & Magazines There are three major daily newspapers in New York: The ***New York Times,*** the ***Daily News,*** and the ***New York Post.*** Each comes out in the morning. The *Times* is best for hard news and cultural listings, the *News* best for celebrity gossip, and the *Post* is known for sports. ***Time Out*** **magazine** is also an excellent source for listings of concerts, performances, parties, and other special events that might be happening around town.

Pharmacies See p. 323 for a listing of 24-hour pharmacies.

Smoking Smoking is prohibited in all public indoor spaces, including offices, bars, restaurants, hotel lobbies, and most shops. In general, if you need to smoke, you'll have to go outside into the open air.

Taxes When guestimating your expenses for the trip, you should always factor in the 8.625% **sales tax** on goods and many services (including restaurant meals) and the **hotel tax** of 13.25%, plus $2 per room per night (this also applies to apartment rentals and B&B stays).

Telephone, Telegraph, Telex & Fax Generally, hotel surcharges on long-distance and local calls are astronomical, so you're better off using your **cellphone** or a **public pay telephone.** Many convenience groceries and packaging services sell **prepaid calling cards** in denominations up to $50; for international visitors these can be the least expensive way to call home. Many public phones at airports now accept American Express, MasterCard, and Visa credit cards. **Local calls** made from public pay phones in most locales cost either 25¢ or 35¢. Pay phones do not accept pennies, and few will take anything larger than a quarter.

Most long-distance and international calls can be dialed directly from any phone. **For calls within the United States and to Canada,** dial 1 followed by the area code and the seven-digit number. **For other international calls,** dial 011 followed by the country code, the city code, and the number you are calling.

Calls to area codes **800, 888, 877,** and **866** are toll-free. However, calls to area codes **700** and **900** (chat lines, bulletin boards, "dating" services, and so on) can be very expensive—usually a charge of 95¢ to $3 or more per minute, and they sometimes have minimum charges that can run as high as $15 or more.

For **reversed-charge or collect calls,** and for person-to-person calls, dial the number 0, then the area code and number. An operator will come on the line, and you should specify whether you are calling collect, person-to-person, or both. If your operator-assisted call is international, ask for the overseas operator.

For **local directory assistance** ("information"), dial 411; for long-distance information, dial 1, then the appropriate area code and 555-1212.

Telegraph and telex services are provided primarily by Western Union. You can telegraph money, or have it telegraphed to you, very quickly over the Western Union system, but this service can cost as much as 15% to 20% of the amount sent.

Most hotels have **fax machines** available for guest use (be sure to ask about the charge to use it). Many hotel rooms are even wired for guests' fax machines. A less expensive way to send and receive faxes may be at stores such as **The UPS Store** (formerly Mail Boxes Etc.).

Time The continental United States is divided into four time zones: Eastern Standard Time (EST), Central Standard Time (CST), Mountain Standard Time (MST), and Pacific Standard Time (PST). New York is on Eastern Standard Time, so when it's noon in New York, it's 11am in Chicago (CST), 10am in Denver (MST), and 9am in Los Angeles (PST). Daylight saving moves the clock 1 hour ahead of standard time. (A new law will extend daylight saving time in 2007; clocks will change the 2nd Sunday in March and the 1st Sunday in November.)

Tipping Tips are customary and should be factored into your budget. Waiters should receive 15% to 20% of the cost of the meal (depending on the quality of the service), bellhops get $1 per bag, chambermaids get $1 to $2 per day for straightening your room, and cab drivers should get 15% of the fare.

Toilets Any place in the city that serves coffee (most notably branches of Starbucks) will have restrooms open to the public. You will also be able to find restrooms in the lobbies of almost all Manhattan hotels, at the major bookstores in town, at major department stores, and at the New York City visitor centers (150 Broadway, between 46th and 47th sts., and 810 Seventh Ave., between 52nd and 53rd sts.).

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